COACH AND BUS WEEK

CBW

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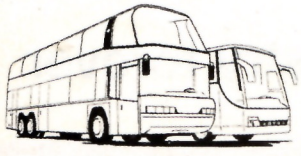

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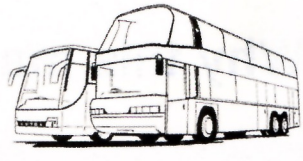

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DURHAM CLAMS UP ON YELLOW BUS COSTS

Council refuses to reveal financial ins and outs of transport division

DURHAM County Council has refused to release financial details of its Yellow Bus operation.

A formal request by operator Ian Ashman of A&J Coaches of Washington, under the Freedom of Information Act, was refused because the council says details of wages, repair costs and other running costs including property outgoings would 'prejudice the commercial interests of Durham County Council' and is exempt from disclosure under the Act.

"There is a strong public interest in protecting the commercial interests of the County Council, and also in carrying out a fair tendering process," said the council's FoI co-ordinator Peter Dinsdale.

In a letter to Mr Ashman, Mr Dinsdale admitted: "While there is a clear public interest in understanding some of the information relating to the running of the Yellow School Buses, in relation to accountability in decision making and the spending of public money, it is felt that this is outweighed by the public interest in maintaining exemption at this time."

Mr Ashman says he is representing operators who fear retribution if they get directly involved in asking searching questions: "What they're up against are hire rates of £100 a day, with schools being told in no uncertain terms to hire from the council. I will appeal against the decision not to disclose this information."

Details of the Yellow Bus trial in which three Irisbus Scolabuses were bought to run to a single school reveal that 'a number' of operators were concerned. A report from the first period of assessment – from which financial information is deleted, outlines the objections of two operators.

One said the scheme threatened his employees' livelihood, that the council may expand the fleet further, and that the fleet is unfair competition, particularly as it said schools were being offered travel at significantly below the market rate.

Another, which had bought new 70-seaters for its 16 contracts, also cited job losses and the fact that they are against a not-for-profit organisation with significant economies of scale.

Ian Ashman

FPB OFFERS DISCOUNT TO TRANSPORT OPERATORS

THE FORUM of Private Business, which represents 25,000 small and medium-sized firms, is offering transport businesses a 20% reduction in joining fees if they sign up via the *www.fpb.org* website.

FPB claims to offer a range of money-saving benefits to aid running costs which quickly repay the investment. Manager Jenny Stewart said the organisation had fine-tuned its membership package over the last 12 months to deliver maximum benefit to transport business members.

She said: "We know how tough it is to run a business and we're here to make life cheaper and easier. Moreover, we can provide an effective voice for our members locally and nationally on the issues that matter to them, through our work in the media and the political world.

Member benefits through joining online include: £50,000 legal expenses cover for employment tribunals, tax investigations etc; Helpline offering assistance with legal, employment or business issues; Up to 66% savings on acclaimed guides covering employment law, health & safety and business operation; a free credit control guide; savings of up to 70% on telephone calls through a deal with Chess Telecom and a debt recovery service.

Companies with up to ten employees can join online for £120 a saving of £30. With 11-20 employees the fee rises to £160 – a saving of £40. Those with larger businesses are asked to call 0845 130 1722.

VOLVO WRITES DOWN BLUE BIRD HOLDING

AB VOLVO has gone ahead with its proposed write-down of its holding in US-based bus and coach manufacturer Blue Bird. The amount of the write down is valued at $71 million but Volvo says it will have no cash effect.

Volvo owned 42.5% of Peach County Holdings Inc. – a company formed in conjunction with various institutions following the insolvency of its previous partner, Henlys Group, in 2004.

Peach County Holdings comprises Volvo, a consortium of banks, a British pension fund and Blue Bird's management team.

Volvo says since it was spun out of Henlys, Blue Bird has developed less favourably and so, together with the other Peach County Holdings shareholders, it investigated strengthening measures. However, Volvo has decided not to pursue such possibilities itself and will, as a result, now recognise an impairment loss for the fourth quarter of 2005 totalling. This comprises Volvo's share in the earnings of Peach for the fourth quarter of 2005 and the book value of the holding in the company.

OPERATOR TO SUE CUSTOMS

A NORTH East operator has claimed that seizure of his vehicle by Customs has lost him tens of thousands of pounds and that the £65,000 vehicle is now useless.

At a public inquiry (pages 22-23) G&G Travel proprietor Gary Wheatley said a vehicle impounded almost three years ago following accusations that its passengers had been illegally importing alcohol and tobacco has been left with open roof vents, and is now 'scrap.'

Mr Wheatley had to pay £25,000 costs, yet has never been charged with an offence.

He says he now intends to privately prosecute HM Customs for having damaged the vehicle.

STOP PRESS

STATEMENT from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister regarding Nexus' concessionary travel scheme funding shortfall (see p8-9):

"We are examining Nexus' request for more funding urgently. We are completely aware of Nexus' timetable." Officials said they cannot say when a decision will be made.

TAX REBEL, 80

AN 80-year-old woman is refusing to pay her council tax after her local bus service was cut and says, "If they say I'll have to go to court, I'll have a job to get there!" The pensioner from Glenholt, Plymouth, now has to walk an extra half mile to the nearest stop. First says the route was not commercially viable.

Crime conference will debate the issues

CBW is backing the debate at a conference on bus crime at the end of next month.

Reducing Crime on Public Transport, staged in association with the Home Office, sets out to explore the latest policies and technology which target a rising tide of vandalism and violence aboard buses.

Held at Earls Court One in London, the conference will hear from British Transport Police, operators, the Crown Prosecution Service and other stakeholders how new strategies are reducing bus crime in some trouble spots, and how operators can reduce the fear of crime – often a bigger problem than the crime itself.

CBW editor Mark Williams said: "Passengers' fear of crime at bus stations, bus stops and aboard buses is preventing some growth in the industry.

"The industry needs urgently to work with local government not only to reduce crime but to reassure passengers that public transport is safe, at any time of the day or night."

Speakers include:

- Jeroen Weimar, director of transport policing and enforcement, Transport for London
- Roger Fisher, hear of the Fear of Crime Unit, Home Office
- Leo Markham, officer for Wales, Bus Users UK
- Sgt Phil Bennett, principal architectural liaison officer, British Transport Police

Presentations at the conference begin with two morning sessions followed by two afternoon seminar debating sessions with the choice of four subjects in each. Full details are on the website *www.neilstewartassociates.com/li226*

- For full details of this conference, call Natasha Wildman on 0207 234 4357 or email *natasha.wildman@neilstewartassociates.com* and mention that you are a *CBW* reader to get a special discount.

Figures show Flights lost £220k in a month

AS expected, Rotala plc has issued a sorry set of figures, following the long-lasting controversial deals surrounding the acquisition of the Flights group of companies (*CBW*, January 12).

Although Rotala was incorporated on January 21, 2005, its function was that of an investment company until August 30, when the Flights group was acquired in £3.78m deal.

Consequently, the interim statement to September 30, covers only one month of trading of the Flights group, and shows a trading loss of £219,000. Added to that are administrative expenses of £160,000 giving a loss on ordinary activities before interest for the period of £379,000. After net interest of £58,000 and nil taxation, the accumulated loss carried forward was nearly £321,000.

Chairman John Gunn's statement warns that the losses will continue until certain, inherited "onerous" contracts finally end in 2007. He said in the meantime the board had been working hard to reduce costs and eliminate unprofitable activities. A National Express contract ends on 26 January, but the £2m revenue loss had already been replaced – at "significantly better margins" – with other customers "largely within the airline sector".

Hendy named as new TfL boss

PETER HENDY, managing director of surface transport at Transport for London has been named as London's new Transport Commissioner.

He succeeds controversial American Bob Kiley and starts the job from February.

He will have total responsibility for all transport in London, including tube, tram, light rail and river services, as well as buses.

Ken Livingstone, Mayor of London, says, "I have no doubt that Peter will provide inspirational leadership for Transport for London."

Hendy, who is also chairman of the Commission for Integrated Transport, called the post, "a great opportunity to lead the UK's most impressive transport organisation forward through the investment programme and towards a successful 2012 Olympics."

EDITOR'S COMMENT

If you want a job done properly...

IF EVER operators thought local authorities were a cash cow that could be milked for profit, that illusion is being well and truly shattered.

The development of council-run coach and bus fleets and their blank refusal to account for the ratepayers' money that's being spent on running them, coupled with the imposition of contract conditions suggest the industry's up against a real commercial threat.

Before we all get carried away, we acknowledge the enormous contribution our councils and PTEs already make, not just to the coffers of commercial operation but to the wider development of public transport. There are a great many examples of councils who've worked closely and effectively with the private sector towards growing ridership. But a large number have not.

In their defence, some regions say fleets have been developed to combat the perception of operator monopoly – an allegation that contract prices have been levered by illicit cartels. In others, councils have felt the quality of service they demand is simply unavailable so have bought what they need themselves.

But no matter which reason local authorities use to justify running large, high-turnover operations, the obligation to provide ratepayers – including local operators – with financial transparency is paramount. The public's cash is being invested on these projects, and it has a right to know the truth about the profit or loss generated.

At present, the situation is mired in obfuscation and murk. Explaining why it won't disclose its fleet P&Ls, Durham County Council says: "We believe this exemption applies, as disclosure of information such as the daily rate could be used by third parties as a benchmark against other contracts for which they may be bidding."

Never mind the fact that commercial operators give their daily rate willingly, to anyone, over the phone, can anyone explain to me how, if operators are trying to undercut the daily rate of a not-for-profit operation, this can be a bad thing for the ratepayer?

Mark Williams

Mark Williams
EDITOR

OPTARE TO OFFER EGR/SCR CHOICE

Operators given choice of emission technology

OPTARE is offering its customers of EGR or SCR alternatives to allow bus operators the choice of the most suitable emissions technology for their individual purposes.

Both Optare Solo and Tempo models are currently supplied with either Cummins or Mercedes-Benz engines and both these use selective catalytic reduction technology to meet emissions requirements.

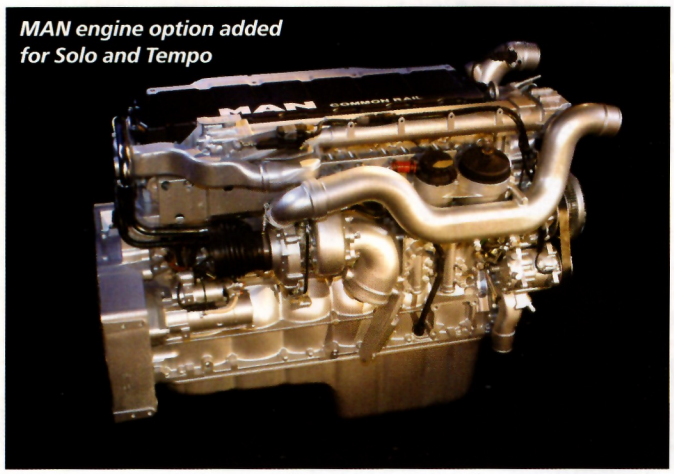
The company has taken the decision to offer increased choice by introducing four and six cylinder MAN engines, employing exhaust gas recirculation technology. The latter for operators preferring the simplicity of refuelling with diesel only.

Optare says it is throwing down the gauntlet to some of its larger competitors whose freedom to offer both technologies is restricted by established links to parent companies or particular engine manufacturers who have invested in one or other of the Euro IV/V technologies.

Group technical director Glenn Saint said: "Our independent status has always allowed us to offer Optare customers the best available technology choices and this is again demonstrated at this important watershed in engine design.

Both SCR and EGR have advantages but set some challenges and, while both will involve significant funding impact, there is little to choose between them in terms of operating cost or purchase price.

"We are aware that some of our customers are feeling uncomfortable at being forced by their bus suppliers to choose one or the other technology, which is why we are pleased to be able to offer both."



MAN engine option added for Solo and Tempo

VOLVO TO EXPAND PRODUCTION IN INDIA

VOLVO Bus Corporation is to double production capacity at its Bangalore facility in India.

Currently the factory builds 450-500 units per year, a mixture of touring coaches, intercity and city buses, but the company is predicting an annual growth rate of 25% per year.

Volvo sales increased, in India, by 30-35% in 2004 and export sales to Bangladesh and other South Asian regions now running at 10%, from Bangalore, are also expected to grow by 20-25%.

Chief executive Hakan Karlsson said Volvo planned to develop a global platform for manufacturing buses and coaches. It would localise components in the area and use India and China as an Asian sourcing hub and export centre for neighbouring countries. Around 40% of components are locally sourced and this is to be increased to 60%. He said the region held an emerging population of globally capable suppliers and that components sourced from India would have a distinct cost advantage and could well be introduced to its worldwide operations.

Moves into the citybus market were initiated with the sale of 25 buses to Bangalore Metropolitan Transport Corporation.

BRITAIN AND EUROPE CRITICISED OVER BIOFUEL PLANS

EUROPEAN Community nations, Britain and Finland in particular, have been criticised for not sufficiently promoting the production and use of biofuels.

With production levels at a bare minimum, demand is said to be outstripping production by a huge margin and this is leading to supplies being sent from countries such as Brazil, where forests are being torn down.

The environmental impact of deforestation is claimed to be extremely damaging as local people seek to provide palm oil as a source of biofuel.

The EU had planned to reach a 5.75% biofuel use target by 2010 but now admits it will fall short. Austria is currently the leading user at 2.5%. Britain is one of the worst at 0.3%.

The EU says it will review the situation this year hopes to introduce a system that guarantees biofuel sourcing is not damaging sensitive environments.

● DO you think Britain is doing enough to promote Biofuels? email *mark.williams@rouncymedia.co.uk*

NEOPLAN SELLS GOPPEL SHARES

NEOPLAN Bus has sold its 37% shareholding in Neoplan Goppel to Markus Goppel Karosserie und Fahzeugbau of Augsburg.

Goppel had taken over 51% of the shareholding in 2002 and has now acquired a full 100% holding.

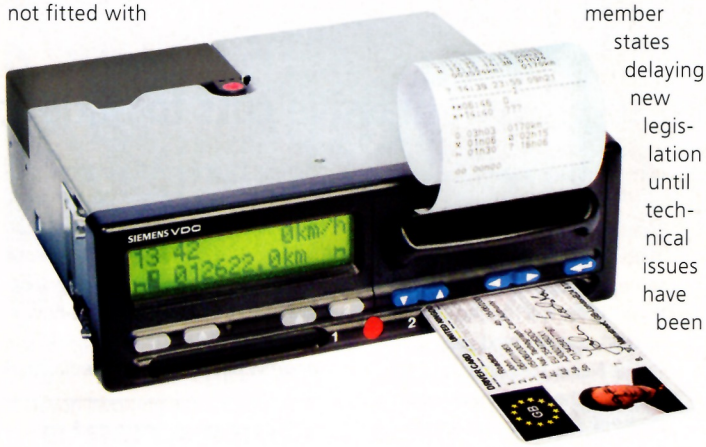
The move slims the NeoMAN structure but the manufacturer plans to co-operate with Markus Goppel in the production and delivery of midibuses and the supply of seating to Neoplan Bus.

Ongoing co-operation also include focusing on the development of MAN's new midibus generation – the Lion's Midi, and Neoplan's Centroliner 4509.

Digitach: the pain in Spain

COACH operators visiting Spain with new vehicles need to be aware Spanish Police are on the lookout for any coaches registered after 1 January, 2006 which are not fitted with digital tachographs.

Spain has decided to implement one of the latter target introduction dates for digital tachographs despite the rest of the member states delaying new legislation until technical issues have been ironed out. Fines of between 4,600 and 6,000 euros can be levied if the vehicle is fitted with an analogue tachograph.



Both the Confederation of Passenger Transport and the Road Haulage Association have called on transport ministers to investigate the matter as they understood the EU agreement was, given the previous technical difficulties, to delay the effective date for digitach introduction until spring 2006.

CPT UK says it would like all operators with new coaches registered on or after 1 January, which are or will be equipped with an analogue tachograph, to contact them as soon as possible. Please notify *colinc@cpt-uk.org*

UKCS teams up with Moseley (PCV)

UK COACH Search and Moseley (PCV) have reached an agreement where Moseley will offer the UKCS tracking & satellite navigation system fitted on any new or used coach it supplies.

The device will allow customers to monitor the movements of their coaches and produce detailed reports to assist in controlling running costs.

Since UKCS installed a 'consolidation' function into its website it can now encourage greater fleet utilisation and help generate greater efficiency.

Impressed by the capabilities of the system, Karl Moseley said: "Tracking and satellite navigation is seen as the next big technological development in the industry and the system developed by UKCS is dedicated specifically to coach operations. For any customers wishing to specify this system we have reached an agreement with Autosound to install the units prior to delivery."

● Details from John Bywater on 0161 441 0250.

Petroplus signs with BlueCat

TEESIDE-BASED fuel and oil supplier Petroplus has signed a distribution deal with BlueCat AdBlue.

Bulk AdBlue, the urea based source of ammonia for Euro 4 and 5 vehicles using SCR emissions technology, will be distributed under the Blue-plus brand to larger end-users and regional distributors nationwide.

The company says the deal means both J&H Bunn and Petroplus can offer guaranteed bulk deliveries nationwide and should allay operators' fears about cost-effective bulk supplies throughout the country.

Ten new Citaros for Oxford

OXFORD Bus Company has taken delivery of ten Mercedes-Benz Citaros to upgrade its regular services between the city centre and Kidlington. The batch brings the number of Citaros with Oxford to 27.

Commercial director Nigel Eggleton said: "We've been very pleased with our Citaros. They are fully air conditioned and offer our customers a standard of comfort second to none. We could have bought less expensive vehicles but we believe passenger reaction will justify the extra investment and encourage people to leave their cars at home and travel by bus."

12 more buses for EYMS

FOLLOWING last week's announcements on it vehicle order programme, East Yorkshire Motor Services has now confirmed an additional 12 buses.

Aimed exclusively at local services, the order is for six Wrightbus Eclipse Gemini Volvo B7TL double deckers and six Wrightbus Eclipse Urban Volvo B7RLE single deck buses. All 12 will feature full CCTV systems and LED destination displays.

£600k investment for First Eastern National

YARMOUTH town services have been boosted by the introduction of three Wrightbus Eclipse bodied Volvo B7LE for use on the busy Route 8 which was converted to lowfloor operation last year.

The new buses are part of a £600,000 investment by First which also includes a £100,000 refurbishment of six double decker buses and the upgrading of workshop facilities at the company depot – including a new rolling road brake tester and inspection pit.

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NEXUS IN TALKS AS AXE HANGS OVER SCHOOLS RUN

North East PTE demands bigger grant to prevent massive cuts to budget

ANDREW PEACE, CBW NEWS EDITOR

NEXUS is pressing ahead with its threat to cut 60% of its school travel budget – and a host of other drastic cuts – in order to fund the upcoming concessionary fares scheme.

The Tyne and Wear PTE called on government last week to increase its allocation of the revenue support grant fund to make up its £7.5m shortfall. But so far it has not received a response and time is running out – it must publish its 2006/07 budget by the end of this week, ready for consideration at a PTA meeting on the 26 January.

"We are continuing to talk to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM)," says a spokesman. "Talks are going on in the background, and we are still hopeful that a better solution will be reached. It is very awkward timing."

The ODPM's consultation on concessionary travel lasts until 25 January. It has been indicated to Nexus that no decision will be made until "at least" then – the day before the PTA meets to decide the budget.

Nexus is expected to recommend to its PTA that school bus services should be reduced from serving 50 schools to just four; an end to the subsidised teen travel scheme; a 33% rise in charges for the child concessionary travel scheme; a 16% reduction in the secured services budget; a £300,000 saving in administration expenses, and the same in infrastructure savings. Even then, Nexus will have to use £2m of its own reserves next year.

The Nexus cuts also place the future of the brand new hybrid Quaylink service under threat. Failed capital projects in the regenerated Quayside area of Newcastle and Tyneside, which were to have contributed to the start up cost of the scheme, have left £0.5m hole in the funding. Nexus was expected to contribute a third of the shortfall. The service has already attracted strong local criticism because of small passenger numbers. Bernard Garner, Director of Development for Nexus, told CBW, "We acknowledge there is a shortfall in the capital works undertaken by Gateshead and Newcastle councils. We will be discussing with our partners how this shortfall can be addressed."

andrew.peace@rouncymedia.co.uk

The Nexus cuts could spell trouble for the new Quaylink service

OPERATOR'S OPINION

LES Annis, owner of A-Line Coaches – who runs school and bus services – stands to lose at least two drivers and two vehicles (out of a fleet of eight) if the cuts go through. He is waiting with bated breath to hear the outcome of the talks, but in the meantime directs his criticism at the wider implications of the scheme. He told *CBW*, "One of the problems is that the scheme doesn't include the Metro – we feed directly into one of the stops. Pensioners will take the longer – but free – route instead. Anything that is secured by the PTA should be part and parcel of any free scheme."

MONEY WOES IN SCOTLAND

SCOTLAND'S concessionary fares scheme – which will be funded by direct reimbursement of cost rather than by the complicated demographic formula employed in England – is also coming under financial pressure. Costs have reportedly risen from £13m to £34m over the last three months with ministers admitting they are not sure why.

FIRST ASKS FOR RESTRICTION RETHINK

FIRST GROUP has asked the OFT to remove its operating restrictions in central and lowland Scotland. The conditions were imposed by the Competition Commission shortly after First's acquisition of SB Holdings in 1996.

The restrictions have two elements: a fare cap covering most of First's First Glasgow, Midland Bluebird and Lowland operating areas, and a package of 'anti-predation' undertakings covering the Midland Bluebird and Lowland areas. The 'anti-predation' undertakings regulate prices and minimum service levels, and include restrictions on fare and frequency changes, journey intervals and competition against tendered services. First says that all the undertakings should be removed because of significant changes in the market.

The OFT is seeking the views of interested parties such as passenger transport authorities, local authorities and bus companies. Interested parties should send their views by January 26 to Mrs C Bowley, OFT, Fleetbank House, 2-6 Salisbury Square, London EC4Y 8JX e-mail: *carole.bowley@oft.gsi.gov.uk*. A decision is expected by the beginning of March.

Police probe fatal crash

POLICE are still investigating the cause of the fatal accident last week in Devon involving a bus operated by Turners Tours of Chumleigh.

One person, 17-year-old Anita Quartly from Chawleigh, died at the scene. Four other people – including three out of the six passengers on the bus – were taken to hospital. None of their injuries were described as life threatening.

The accident happened at approximately 6pm on January 10 on the A377 between Lapford and Copplestone near Crediton, Devon. The single decker bus collided head-on with a car as it travelled in the direction of Lapford.

The 35-year-old Polish agency driver was arrested at the scene on suspicion of causing death by dangerous driving. He was released on police bail pending further enquiries and will return on March 21. Soon after his release he was apparently taken away by his agency. No one from Turners Tours has seen or spoken to him since.

VOSA vehicle examiners recovered the vehicle from the scene the day after the accident but were not due to begin their inspection until Tuesday or Wednesday this week.

Yellow Bus deal worth £15m

BOURNEMOUTH City Council has finally announced that Transdev paid £15m for its Yellow Bus company.

The deal was concluded in December but the council held off releasing the figure on Transdev's request.

Transdev has promised to preserve key community routes, abide by the existing terms and conditions of current staff and pledged to improve and update the service. It has also pledged to ensure the "fair treatment of staff in respect of pension benefits" and to retain the Yellow Bus name.

For its part the council has promised to invest "a substantial proportion" of the proceeds in sustainable transport. The deal also includes terms to ensure the council benefits from any onward selling of the company and its assets, including the new Yellow Bus depot.

Paul Westbrook of KPMG Corporate Finance, lead advisors to the council on the sale, said "This deal demonstrates that it's a great market for sellers at the moment. However, not only is this an excellent price for the Council but it's also a good addition for Transdev who are committed to growing their regional network."

Hewitt hears of bus fears

THE Secretary of State for Health, Patricia Hewitt has chaired a meeting between angry bus users and bus company chiefs.

Ms Hewitt, the MP for Leicester West, called the meeting after receiving numerous complaints from elderly people about cuts in local bus services. Many pensioners say they are now facing return taxi fares of £8 to get to hospital or GP appointments from one estate in Leicester, where First bus have cancelled a service.

After the meeting Ms Hewitt said: "I think we have seen a real improvement in the way bus services are run, but there are still real problems for elderly people. Some pensioners don't have routes that allow them to get to doctors, dentists and other services."

A spokesman for First said the company would consider customers' concerns, but he added: "It is difficult to work out a way of providing socially necessary services in a commercially viable way. We get little in subsidies from the council – about 1% of our turnover... we are a company and we have to look to making a profit for our shareholders."

NEWS IN BRIEF

Brighton rocks

Brighton and Hove Bus Company is celebrating another year of passenger increases, with 4.4 per cent more people using Brighton's buses compared to 2004. Brighton is one of only three cities where bus use is growing. The rise is attributed to an increase of bus frequency on busier routes, investment in new buses and real-time information displays.

Lakeside link-up

ENSIGNBUS of Purfleet has started a new bus service linking Grays with Lakeside shopping centre via West Thurrock and Purfleet. The service runs six days a week at hourly intervals with the timetable allowing for connections with c2c train services to London at Purfleet Station.

TWM assaults down

TWM's Operation Safer Travel has reduced assaults on staff by 29% - from 163 in 2004 to 115 in 2005. The company says this level is still unacceptable but says it is pleased to have achieved such a large reduction. The success is being put down to the use of CCTV (from 'CrystalEyes') and other initiatives like providing police with free travel.

Teenager killed

A TEENAGER was killed and three others seriously injured when the car they were travelling in collided with a bus on a railway bridge in south London at the weekend. The bus hit the bridge wall and knocked debris onto the track although a passing train was not hit. The bus driver and his single passenger were unhurt.

Gloag sued

COACH company owner Robin Gloag is being sued by Network Rail over allegations that a train was delayed by one of his school buses. Network Rail has gone to court to try to claw back fines it had to pay when a train was held up by more than five hours. It claims one of Gloag's Highwayman coaches crashed into a level crossing barrier next to the company depot at Errol, Perthshire. Network Rail is seeking £3,552 compensation. Gloag is contesting the claim and has denied liability on the basis that the consequence of any accident could not reasonably have been foreseen.

PTEs IN THE DRIVING SEAT

CBW explores the road to Quality Contracts

David Brown

THE CONTROVERSY surrounding last week's announcement that South Yorkshire PTE and Nexus are formally investigating quality contract schemes centres around two key points.

The first is over the cause of the decline in bus patronage outside London. Incumbent South Yorkshire operator First Group, backed up by the CPT, says service reliability and speed – the accepted keys to increasing patronage - are down to the use of bus priority measures and highway improvements.

Both of these, they say, are achievable under their current, and preferred, Quality Partnership schemes.

The second is over when it is appropriate – or even legal - to use Quality Contracts. First Group, again backed by the CPT, say they should be used only when all else has been tried and failed.

Unsurprisingly both PTEs have some issues with these points of view. CBW catches up with David Brown, passenger services director at SYPTE, three days after the 'market consultation exercise' was published in the Official Journal of the European Union, to get the PTE's side of the story.

CBW: Have you had much interest in the tender document yet?
"Yes, we have had expressions of interest from a number of operators (into double figures as *CBW* went to press). They have been a mix of all types – small, medium and large."

CBW: Some people say Quality Contracts schemes favour larger operators
"Some people do say that, but I can say that we want the widest range of operators, a cross section. There is a role there for all sorts, and not just necessarily UK operators – if we do it at all."

CBW: Can you describe what has led up to this announcement?
"In the context of passenger numbers outside London continuing to fall, last July South Yorkshire PTA members requested an investigation of all options for best delivering SYPTE's bus strategy. During the last five years we have invested a lot of effort in voluntary partnerships. We have been working very hard to achieve improvements and we have had some success in some areas, but we are asking ourselves, is there a better way of doing things?"

CBW: First Group and the CPT say Quality Contracts should only be pursued when all else has failed. Have you tried everything else in South Yorkshire?
"My understanding of the legislation is that we have to demonstrate that Quality Contracts are the only practicable way of achieving our bus strategy."

CBW: What do you think of First Group's reaction to the announcement?
"We already work very closely with First Group and we would welcome their input, we would really. If they have reservations we would ask them not to discount Quality Contracts out of hand."

CBW: Has the government encouraged you to explore using Quality Contracts?
"They have neither encouraged nor discouraged us in this but we are actively encouraged generally to look at all the legislation available to us to achieve our bus strategy."

CBW: The industry is saying that the only way to improve service speed and reliability is to make highway improvements. How will Quality Contracts help in this respect?
"We have never said that QCs will answer all the questions. But QCs will give five years of stability, and confidence on all sides, to make some of these contentious highway improvements. I would say that there are other factors like boarding times and off-bus ticketing that have a significant effect on speed and reliability too."

CBW: What happens next?
"The closing date for the tender exercise is January 31, 2006. We will take a close look at the applications during the first week of February and send the applicants a set of schedules for the example networks. We will make a decision at the beginning of April and then make a public announcement at the end of April."

CBW: Have you had much contact with the other PTEs regarding this exercise?
"We have agreed that at the end of the exercise we will share the headline results with all of the other PTEs."

CBW SAYS...

SYPTE is 'flying a kite,' in business parlance, with its tender for Quality Contracts but there's every good reason to take David Brown seriously.

It's a shrewd move. By suggesting that it will impose Quality Contracts, SYPTE has provoked the kind of reaction from operators I am sure it fully expected. The robust debate is probably long overdue.

Mr Brown's assurance that operators of every size have responded to the tender is no surprise. In business, there's a need for pragmatism; no company is going to sacrifice its existence on a matter of principle. If SYPTE can foist Quality Contracts upon its operators – and that's open to question – that's what operators will prepare for.

But time and again we have heard successive Transport Secretaries including Alistair Darling give cast-iron assurances that Quality Contracts will not be an option until the Government is convinced that all other partnership options have been exhausted.

Indeed, at last year's CPT Dinner Mr Darling said: "I can assure you we will not return to the regulated world of the 1980s. We will look at giving the local authorities greater control over bus services but they will have to come to me.

"We won't offer control simply because the councils and bus companies won't work together."

It is absolutely clear to me that major operators want to talk about Quality Partnership deals but that some local authorities are turning them away at the council office door.

National Express in particular has been spitting tacks over the intransigence of authorities who seem to care more about populism than public transport policy.

SYPTE has not told a story of how it has battled with operators to broker Partnerships, or the sticking points that have prevented it making a deal. More importantly, it has not adequately explained how Quality Contracts can achieve what Partnerships cannot.

This is not some a lofty political debate, it's about the public, and how the industry and local authorities persuade car drivers to make more journeys by bus.

SYPTE can cite London as an example of growing bus patronage all it likes, but if it is not prepared to introduce Congestion Charging and bus priority, and find an equivalent of the £0.5 billion London spends supporting public transport, it won't realise its ambition.

WHAT YOU THINK ABOUT IT...

Clayton Jones, Shamrock Coaches

PONTIPRIDD based bus operator Shamrock Coaches, which operates buses and coaches throughout South Wales has come out in favour of Quality Contracts, and has already submitted plans for such a contract, as far back as 2001.

Proprietor Clayton Jones said that a comprehensive Quality Contract document had been submitted to Rhondda Taff Council over four years ago, and has not yet been replied to.

His proposals for the Aberdare to Cardiff corridor, required numerous traffic management measures to be put in place by the Council. In return he would be able to upgrade the quality of his services and run them all commercially. "Unfortunately, Quality Bus Partnerships are voluntary, and it is in the bus operators' interest to make sure that the road improvements agreed to are actually delivered." He said.

Mr Jones discussed tendering for London franchises in the past, using drivers bussed in from South Wales, and holds an operators licence for the South East Traffic area in readiness for such an expansion. Asked whether he would be interested in applying for Quality Contracts in other areas, Mr Jones said that it would depend on what was on offer. "If the package was good, we would be interested", he said.

Nicola Shaw, managing director of First's UK Bus Division

"THERE is no need for this consultation – indeed it is a distraction. The PTEs are right when they say there are three options for bus service delivery. What they fail to mention is that the third route via Quality Contracts is only permitted where the first two are failing.

"In the north Sheffield Quality Partnership area, First are not failing. In fact we have delivered our required network revision and part of the new vehicle commitment before any highway or bus stop works have begun. Unless this slow public sector delivery changes then bus users will be short changed.

"What we need to work on is improved delivery for passengers now. That vitally requires better bus priority measures to guarantee journey times to passengers. Time and time again people tell us that reliability is key to their use of buses.

"Quality Contract / Partnership or any other delivery arrangement between public and private sector would fail to address this issue without public sector delivery on the road networks in the form of bus priority and enforcement of bus lanes. Both the government and First want to see more people on buses – both public and private sector need to deliver if we are to achieve that.

"This applies across the country. Quality Contracts solve nothing - the real problem is tackling congestion and if that cannot be delivered by local authorities now why should it change under a Quality Contract?

"We would urge the PTE to set this proposal aside and work with us to ensure delivery of the right bus priority measures that many other towns and cities enjoy. We owe it to passengers."

Mike Cooper, managing director, Arriva UK Regions,

"ARRIVA wholeheartedly supports the PTEs' aim of improving services, and we continue to be committed to working closely with local authorities to bring about further real, measurable benefits for bus users.

"Our vision for public transport involves long-term Partnership commitments with local authorities, PTEs and Highway Authorities.

"Clearly we will consider what response we may make to the consultation from Nexus and SYPTE. New thinking is always welcome but we are surprised at the emphasis placed on a Quality Contract approach by PTEs, particularly as it appears to be to the exclusion of other ideas," said Mr Cooper.

"Quality Partnerships have already delivered excellent results, and there is great scope for PTEs to build on the success of this approach.

"The real issue affecting the efficiency of public transport is congestion and the lack of priorities for bus users. Quality Contracts do not appear to resolve these issues.

"We are open to developing a radical approach to complement radical measures undertaken by local authorities to improve the efficiency of the highway network and to bring real benefits to bus users. These efforts should be co-operative and in Partnership to deliver substantial and sustained progress."

Peter Shipp, chief executive, East Yorkshire Motor Group

"We are wary of them – we agree with the CPT's view. The existing legislation should be enough."

Bob Dunn, chief executive, Dunn-Line

"We are very interested. It will provide a lot of opportunities."

WHAT IS A QUALITY CONTRACT?

QUALITY Contracts (sometimes referred to as 'franchising') allow local authorities to determine what local bus services should be provided in their areas, and to what standards. Under a QC scheme, local authorities would hold contracts with bus operators giving them exclusive rights to provide services to the authority's specification.

A key feature of a QC scheme is that the traffic commissioners are not responsible for overseeing bus performance. Compliance with QC contracts rests entirely with the local authority. A scheme can last for up to 10 years, but contracts must be renewed at least every five years.

The government says it wants to see Partnerships exploited fully and that quality contracts are an option of last resort. But it says quality contracts can be used if "policies cannot be delivered by other means". They also "do not have to be preceded by a statutory QP that has been tried and failed".

Schemes require Ministerial approval.

BACKGROUND

WHEN SYPTE first announced it was looking into quality contract schemes last July, David Brown told CBW that the key issues in South Yorkshire were stability and confidence, punctuality and delivery quality, and that the product was affordable and easy to understand. He cited the fact that First was implementing its third fare increase in four months, and that services were still being cut. He instanced a real contrast between the bus services and Stagecoach Supertram in Sheffield which was delivering 99% punctuality and growing its market.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Driver missing

AN arrest warrant has been issued for the Edinburgh bus driver who injured by-standers when he crashed into a shelter whilst allegedly four times over the drink drive limit. But Adam Zugaj, 39, failed to turn up for the hearing last week and police admit they have no idea of his whereabouts.

CV Show offer

VISITORS registering for the Commercial Vehicle Show and Automotive Trade Show before the middle of March will get a free copy of the show guide along with their ticket. The show is at the NEC from 25-27 April 2006, spread over five halls with 600 exhibitors expected. See *www.cvshow.com* or *www.atshow.com.*

Crash update

VOSA says that there were no vehicle or mechanical defects that contributed to the accident involving the Terravision coach we reported last week. The coach was embedded in a restaurant front in Whitechapel High Street, London after an apparent collision with a car at 3am. Police say the cause of the accident is still under investigation.

Des calls it a day

TRAVEL West Midlands' Perry Barr Traffic Manager, Des Hadley (below) has retired from the Company after 40 years service. Des, 60, became a conductor at Perry Barr garage in 1965 and then became a driver soon after his 21st birthday. Des moved through the ranks and was appointed as Perry Barr's Traffic Manager in 2002. As part of his send-off, Travel West Midlands have named a Wrights Gemini decker after him.

Pensioner killed

A NINETY year old pensioner involved in an accident with a number 41 First bus in Bristol city centre last week has died in hospital. The driver was also taken to hospital suffering from shock. The victim's family say the incident was a "tragic accident".

DUBLIN PARK AND RIDE PLANS REJECTED

AN attempt by developers to get planning permission for a major park and ride facility in North County Dublin has failed, this time on appeal to An Bord Pleanála.

Fingal County Council had refused a number of proposals to develop a site off the Swords Road, near Dublin Airport, and now An Bord Pleanála has upheld the council's decision.

The proposed development consisted of three separate elements including a hotel, a park and ride facility and 24 all weather playing pitches on a 5.194 hectare site.

The park and ride facility was to be spread over three levels with capacity for up to 2,038 cars, an enclosed bus and ticketing station, as well as a service block and café.

However, the appeals board has upheld Fingal County Council's earlier decision and has blocked the development, stating that hotel use and park and ride use are not permitted within the green-belt zoning.

The board also stated that the proposed development would also endanger public safety by reason of traffic hazard and obstruction of road users, due to the volume of traffic which would have to execute a right turn to enter and to leave the site, together with the necessity to create one/two signal-controlled junctions on a heavily-trafficked road.

Finally, the Board noted that the applicant failed to submit a detailed bus service plan and parking management strategy for the park and ride facility, which would detail the impact of the proposal on the R132 and wider road network.

BUS STOP SHOULD BE MOVED – INQUEST

THE placement of a bus-stop described as "tight" by the Garda Forensic Collision Unit may have contributed to the death of a pensioner, and should be reviewed, according to the findings of an inquest into the death of Thomas McMahon, who sustained serious injuries while trying to board a Bus Atha Cliath vehicle, and later died following complications.

Witnesses on the bus said the man approached the door shortly before it pulled out from a stop at Mount Pleasant Avenue in Clontarf on January 17, 2004.

Dublin City Coroner's Court was told that 95pc of Mr Mahon's left foot was crushed under the front wheel of the bus and had to be amputated later that day. Initially he made a good recovery, but he developed a serious chest infection while in hospital, and died some days later.

Bus driver Kieran Lesley told the inquest that he had checked his mirrors prior to moving off and had not seen Mr Mahon, whom he had known for 14 years as a regular passenger on his route.

"I checked my nearside mirror and I could see a strip all the way down the bus . . . and nowhere was Tom. I could see four or five feet to the left of the bus. I could see the pavement but I couldn't see the inside edge of the pavement where the bushes are," he said.

The bus was parked 2.5 feet out from the pavement and Sgt Colm Finn of the forensic collision unit told the court that the configuration of the bus stop was tight, meaning that bus drivers would have difficulty coming to a halt flush to the pavement.

The jury recorded a verdict of accidental death and recommended that Dublin City Council review the position of the bus stop.

BUS EIREANN TAKE OVER CARLOW TOWN SERVICE

COUNCILLORS in Carlow have awarded a contract for a town bus service to Bus Eireann, some months after independent operator JJ Kavanagh discontinued service on the route due to lack of passengers.

A council spokesman told CBW that three companies had expressed an interest in providing the town bus service, including the original operator, but that Bus Eireann had been awarded the route for a subvention of £35,000 after agreeing to provide a lowfloor bus which would operate on a service pattern agreed with the council.

TITAN LANDS £15M CIE AD CONTRACT

TITAN Worldwide has been awarded the five year contract, worth up to £15million to sell bus and rail advertising on the entire CIE fleet and at transport-related properties throughout the Republic of Ireland.

The contract with CIE previously held by Viacom Outdoor, includes advertising on the exterior and interior of over 2,000 buses, the DART commuter rail system, as well as over 11,000 road and rail side billboards throughout Ireland. The award marks the return of William Apfelbaum and Donald Allman, Titan Worldwide's chairman and chief executive officer respectively, to the transit advertising business in Ireland where they originally contracted with CIE in 1995 as Transportation Displays, Inc.

The award of the contract to Titan follows earlier negotiations with Maiden, which did not come to fruition due to what CIE described as the failure to meet certain financial requirements.

"The award of the CIE contract represents Titan Worldwide's first venture in the European market" said Donald Allman. "We are excited to bring our unique T transit sales focus to the business which will benefit our advertisers and generate significant non-farebox revenue for CIE."

Titan's efforts in Ireland will be led by transit advertising veterans James Barry and Stephen Dunn. Both Barry and Dunn were part of the original TDI Team and worked closely with Apfelbaum and Allman.

Founded in 2000, Titan Worldwide provides sales, marketing, and maintenance of transit, billboard, wallscape, telephone kiosk, street banner, and construction bridge advertising.

ARCHER

KEEP OFF THE GRASS

Ever had one of those days? Archer has...

THE pre-Christmas private hire rush hit us like a tidal wave this year. One minute I was looking at a virtually empty December diary, and the next we were over-booked!

Some days were absolute hell for our schedulers; trying to match late finishing Christmas beanos with early starting school runs isn't easy, especially in an area like ours where other operators' morning availability to cover our contracts is usually poor anyway. Others were hell for our operations staff, because the schedulers had taken some major risks, cut things fine for time in the hope that traffic would be light and got it wrong.

Others went surprisingly smoothly though, despite the amount of business we were doing. No one ran late, no one got lost and nothing broke down (phew!). Some were like the curate's egg though ("Good in parts"). Here's an example.

From 7am onwards, when we unlock the yard and get the show going, one Thursday went stunningly. It was almost frightening. Not a single driver phoned in all day to say they were stuck in traffic/couldn't find the pick up point/found the hirer had booked a 49-seater and was trying to get 53 people onto it/had just been run into by a car or any of the other day to day things that seem to happen. No hirers rang up either to ask where their coach had got to.

I went home happy that evening. We'd carried the day. My enthusiasm in breaking out the Guinness to celebrate was premature though. About 10.20pm, as I was watching the TV news, my mobile rang. It was one of our drivers on a 35-seater job to a posh golf club about 30 miles away taking the staff from a local supermarket to their Christmas dinner.

He was expecting to drop them, then head to the nearest motorway services for a cheap meal courtesy of his discount card, but they'd unexpectedly invited him to join them. Consequently he enjoyed a nouvelle cuisine meal a lot better than my sausage and chips that night! Unfortunately, he'd been told he couldn't leave the coach in the car park but had to park on the lawn beside the clubhouse instead. He'd done this and popped out about 10.15 to see if everything was OK. It wasn't! His coach was now in the lawn not on it – halfway up its tyre sidewalls to be precise – and immovable.

We swung into emergency mode and diverted an earlier finishing 53-seater to his rescue after its last drop. The turn into the golf club is a tight one (yes, you've guessed!), it knocked a gatepost down turning in. We sent two fitters out to see what they could do.

> 'My enthusiasm in breaking out the Guinness to celebrate was premature...'

They deemed the 53-seater still useable, but the 35 was now in up to its rims. It was too dark for them to do anything so they came home.

The following morning two of them set out to dig up the golf club at about the same time as the 53 which had come to the rescue last night set out to go on a local authority school swimming contract. It had to go round the ring road to get to the school. This is an unpredictable road, so the driver left in plenty of time for his pick-up.

Within ½ mile of the school he realised he was going to be very early, so pulled into a lay-by. After about 10 minutes browsing his newspaper he started the engine, put his offside indicators on and looked in his wing mirror. He was treated to the sight of a German truck pushing a Ford Mondeo sideways along the inside lane!

They were pretty well locked together, until the Mondeo reached his rear wheels, miraculously disentangled itself, wiped all his offside skirt panels off then rebounded off his front wheel arch and locked onto the truck again! Meanwhile, up at the club all efforts to exhume the 35 were failing.

We'd gone from total fleet availability to two under par in 24 hours. Covering some of tonight's jobs was looking dodgy.

The accident closed the ring road, the kids missed their swim and the police turned up.

We finally got the 35 back (without any consequential damage, much to my surprise!), the 53's still in dock, and I hope 2006 will be a lot better. Happy New Year!

Has Archer hit the mark, or is he way off target?

Write to the editor, *CBW* Emap Active, Bretton Court, Bretton, Peterborough, PE3 8DZ e-mail *mark.williams@emap.com*

Show organisers praise industry for co-operation as Excursions 2006 breaks records. Mark Williams reports

OPERATORS MAKE IT A GREAT DAY OUT

A 'GREAT days out' fair for group organisers got the vote of several major operators for being a great day out for its clients.

Excursions 2006 at Alexandra Place in North London celebrated its 30th birthday and best year ever when it was staged last week, to the unanimous approval of Redwing, Reynolds Diplomat, Cooks, Kirby Coaches, Richardson Travel and others whose group clients turned out.

The Tourism South East event has been building on attracting travel organisers from groups as varied as women's institutes, church organisations and social clubs, and this year laid on free coach travel from points West and North, in addition to attracting 150 group organisers who arrived with operators.

"We've seen some very good people, and they are looking to do business," said Sue Reynolds, or Reynolds Diplomat of Watford. "We brought a coach group of organisers ourselves. This is an event we have done every year.

"We took our group to Kew Gardens in the morning followed by a visit to the show – and having a 'captive audience' is always helpful."

Show organisers Tourism South East say that even after 30 years, attendances continue to be healthy at Excursions and that it forms a major focus for the annual marketing effort to groups. Supported by VisitLondon and East of England Tourist Board, the one-day show has become a 'great day out' itself.

TSE's head of marketing, Karen Roebuck, said the key to its success had been liaison with coach operators, which had brought in more and better group buyers and had both delivered tourism to the exhibitors and business for coaching.

"This is our third year at 'Ally Pally,'" she told *CBW*. "We have had great support from the Confederation of Passenger Transport's *CoachMarque* initiative, which have helped provide the free coach service at minimal cost to us, and from operators such as Redwing who have provided free shuttles from the rail stations all day."

Visitors aboard the coaches get star treatment, with Blue Badge guiding on the journey to the event, and coffee and biscuits when they are greeted at the door: "All the extras add to their day – after all, the show is about great days out, so that's what we try to provide for group organisers," she told *CBW*.

"The coach industry has worked well with us. We have six coachloads of organisers brought in today plus those who have taken advantage of the free travel from the stations. We had 1,200 people pre-booked, but looking around this morning, I think we have at least doubled that."

Mrs Roebuck said Excursions had become more effective as a marketing event as the relationship with coach operators had grown. TSE also organises two other regional travel fairs which have helped keep the South East's attractions at the front of group organisers' minds.

Karen Roebuck

Keith Payne

Redwing's best-kept secret

REDWING'S groups sales and marketing manager Keith Payne said that in the three years since attending the company's first Excursions event at Alexandra Palace, its value had grown.

"This is the best attendance so far," he told CBW. "This is a very good event to find some more trade contacts as well as being first-class for talking to group organisers."

Mr Payne said that the attendance had proven to be 'serious buyers' who had been on his stand all day. Redwing's marketing information included an impressive array of brochures from three companies, including its Consorts Tours travel company and Reliance of Gravesend brands.

"But the exposure we get also includes the chance for organisers to see first-hand the quality of vehicles we can provide, whether they come via the rail stations or see them parked outside."

Land Cruise packages flying off the shelf

REYNOLDS Diplomat's imaginative Land Cruise tours which begin this year have proven perfect for combating the challenge of low-cost air travel, said Sue Reynolds.

The operator had its range of tour and excursions products brochured on its stand, and said the interest in Land Cruise had suggested more 'departures' will be needed for next season.

Reynolds' Land Cruise allows its customers to take advantage of low-cost air travel without losing the care package associated with its high-quality tours. Reynolds places its vehicle on tour for an extended period – this year in Spain, France and Ireland – giving customers the option of joining and leaving the tour at any point.

While they can choose to use outward and return travel by coach, they can also book their own flights – with suggestions for suitable departures made by Reynolds – and are then free to custom-build anything from a short break to a full, ten-day tour. Reynolds both delivers them to the airport check-in and provides a courier to greet them at the airport when they arrive.

"There's been a lot of interest in Land Cruise," said Mrs Reynolds. "From this week, customers will be able to book the tours on-line through our new Roeville system, which has proven very impressive."

Mrs Reynolds said she is now looking at tying up a deal with a major flight booking service, and investigating ATOL licensing.

Sue Reynolds

Fran Downton, Tourism South East group travel trade officer, Christine Melia, commercial director of TSE, Phil Evans, Greater London Authority tourism manager, Karen Roebuck, head of marketing at TSE, and Jamie Cash, journalist with media partner GTO, celebrate the 30th Excursions

Kings Ferry wins clients over with products

GILLINGHAM-based The Kings Ferry was marketing both its Kings Ferry and Connections brands – and says it made vital new contacts.

Director Vanessa Broster told *CBW* many of the visitors to the show were looking for Kings Ferry to provide tailored services, including travel and accommodation: "But there were a number from outside of the area who were better suited to Connections services," she said.

Connections sub-contracts operators from other regions to provide a complete service to group organisers and other clients, especially corporate groups.

WA Shearings – what's changed?

Jimmy King had his say last summer, when CBW's northern correspondent Andrew Jarosz interviewed him. But now the dust has settled on the merger, he asks 'what's new at WA Shearings?'

IT MAY only seem a few months ago, but it is almost a year – February 1, 2005, in fact – since the first official announcement that years of rivalry were set to end as the UK's two largest coach operators Wallace Arnold of Leeds and Shearings of Wigan announced a merger.

Both companies had been bought out from their owners by respective management and employee teams in the last decade, and were heavily backed by venture capitalists. While the deal waited for approval from the Office of Fair Trading, the industry amused itself guessing whether the identity and practices of Wallace Arnold would disappear, as it seemed on the face of it, that the new company would be led by the existing management team of Shearings.

By the end of March last year, the deal had been cleared, and the new management team contained six former Shearings directors and only two former directors of Wallace Arnold, but the financial structure was not as simplistic as that.

Capital backing

THE new company was backed by venture capitalists 3i with a 67.8% equity, with management and employees holding the remainder. 3i had held the majority stake in the Coach Holiday Group (CHG), Wallace Arnold's parent group, While institutional investors led by Bridgepoint held the majority stake in Shearings, and would have exited, had the proposed flotation of Shearings on the Stock Market in 2004 not been called off.

Reflecting the enlarged control of 3i, the new board was led by chairman Bernard Norman, formerly Wallace Arnold's chairman, although John Slatcher and David Newbould, formerly managing director and finance director of Shearings, retained their positions in the new organisation.

Savings were limited

WHILE it was obvious that operational and marketing synergies would bring savings, there was a limit on what the new company, euphemistically called 'WA-Shearings' could immediately pull off. The company made a brave start on combining feeders where possible, but remained committed to maintaining both advertised tour programmes during 2005. The real savings would not come until 2006.

CBW interviewed WA-S's new transport director Jimmy King during the summer (*CBW* June 16), and reviewed progress to date. Mr King outlined a three-stage plan of action which would lead to a total merger by 2006.

> 'The dominant influence has been 'the Shearings way''

Combined financial and asset figures given at the time of the merger announcement suggested that a combined turnover of £216m would still only give the enlarged company 14% of the market in coach holidays.

Combination of assets would give the new company 447 coaches and 45 hotels, carriage of nearly one million passengers per annum and 3,500 staff.

In May, Phase One involved amalgamating facilities, interchanges and feeders. During the year, Phase Two concentrated on the amalgamation of systems, part of which included a grand plan to set up two Traffic Offices – in Leeds and Stretton, to control different parts of the operations, and of course Phase Three is now, where all the market research and management expertise has been channelled into creating a new corporate product and operation.

In many ways, WA-Shearings is on the brink of achieving the synergies and savings which made the original merger so attractive. Despite attempts to blend the best of both companies, it has to be said that the dominant influence has been 'the Shearings way'.

CBW readers got it right...

ALTHOUGH the WA-Shearings name was introduced as a stopgap, it swiftly became an acceptable nomenclature, and has been subtly incorporated into the former blue of Shearings. In fact, a poll of *CBW* readers showed that 31% favoured the retention of Shearings' blue and over 55% favoured blue and a combination of blue with other colours. Although the new colours weren't rolled out until November, and the new GT livery a month later, they show a refreshing new look to a colour scheme which has subtly evolved over the last ten years.

The new Grand Tourer specification has also shown a lot of careful thought, combining the best of the Wallace Arnold spec, with more practical considerations of a more spacious floor mounted toilet, more leg room and a redesigned servery. If evidence was needed, that the new management was not planning to throw out the baby with the bathwater, the new continental specification on the GT coaches shows the retention of Fansia leather seating and sophisticated audio systems.

Seventy go in merger

IN terms of fleet size, this year's total of 289 illustrates the savings that have been made, While maintaining the same size tour programme. At merger, the combined fleet totalled 447, by June the total was down to 411, and this

year, when 81 coaches in the National Holidays fleet are added in, the total is 370 – a 17% reduction. In addition the WA practice of hiring in private operators to run peak season tours has ceased, and acquired WA vehicles, which were on lease, are being returned as quickly as time permits.

This year's deliveries comprise 15 GT spec coaches and five UK tours spec vehicles – all with floor-mounted toilets and air-conditioning as standard sees the UK seating specification reduced from 48 to 46 seats. The National Holidays 81-strong fleet is being upgraded by the cascading of air-conditioned 2002 coaches, where only a third of the 81 strong fleet was air-conned, and just over a half were fitted with toilets. The 38-strong Grand Tourer fleet is being reduced by three, and the new deliveries will allow 18 coaches to be downgraded to standard layout.

In terms of Travel Agencies and Hotels there have been some reductions. Ironically the Agency cut was not made because bookings are being made over the phone, by post or over the Internet. Mr King said that attempts to woo direct sales are still not very effective, because the elderly tour passengers still prefer to stroll down to the travel agent and make a booking. Nevertheless, some agencies have been closed or sold, after a thorough financial review which included consideration of leases.

Traffic offices become one

THE establishment of two Traffic Offices did not come off. Mr King said the combination of systems giving Leeds charge of operations in Scotland, the North East down to Lincolnshire, the West of England and South Wales, and Stretton the rest of UK and Continental operations did not work out. Towards the end of the year, the Leeds traffic office closed, with all systems now being co-ordinated at Stretton, although the coach fleet tends to follow passenger demand rather than established diagrams – hence a coach seen at Stretton on New Years Eve, could be found operating out of the Torquay depot less than two weeks later.

The removal of some functions from the former WA base at Lowfields Road, Leeds, has not meant closure however. National Holidays and Caledonian Travel administration has stayed, and the spacious engineering base is retained. Engineering continues at the two acquired depots – Hull and Torquay, while the contractual agreement with Volvo to provide engineering cover at Normanton and Exhall depots was terminated at the end of last year.

WA Shearings transport director Jimmy King

WA-S has taken over engineers at both these depots, but still continues its contractual arrangements with Thomas Hardie at Bryn, and MC Truck and Bus in Hythe, Kent. Telesales and product operations have also now been centralised at Wigan.

So, in just under 12 months, both companies have achieved a successful integration, and a new flagship tour company has emerged through the metamorphosis. Even though the hardliners may feel the Wallace Arnold brand has effectively been removed from the market place, the reality is that both companies could not have continued competing in a market that is now up against cheap air travel and (perceived) cheaper motoring costs.

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BRACE YOURSELF FOR MORE LAW

Age discrimination, family-friendly reforms, sexual harassment law and redundancy consultation will all become part of your business soon. Our Legal Eagle takes a look at what to expect in the coming months

AGE DISCRIMINATION KICKS IN

AGE DISCRIMINATION is the final piece in the jigsaw of the EU Employment Equality Directive and is probably the one area which will herald the most fundamental changes in the UK.

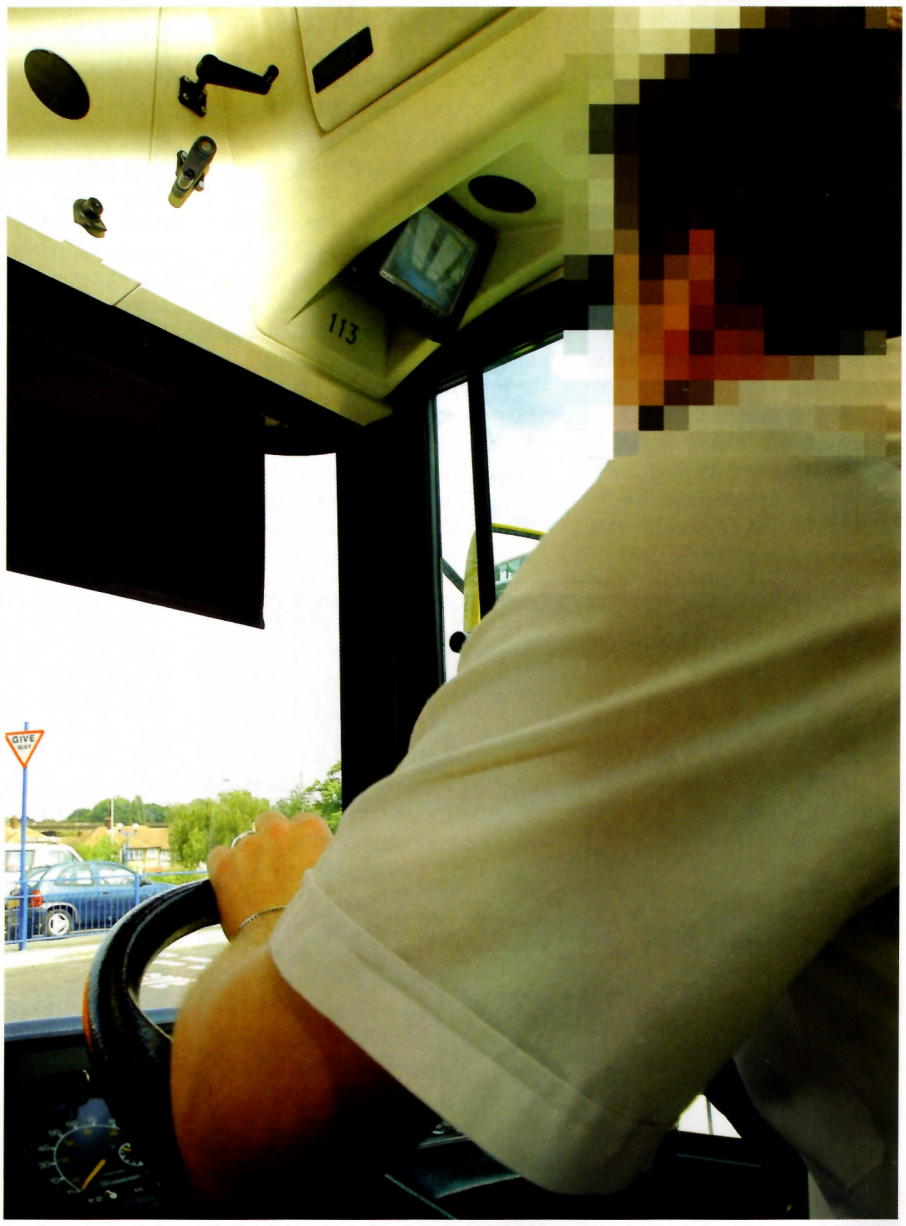
The new Regulations are due to come into force in October 2006 and will outlaw direct and indirect discrimination, as well as harassment and victimisation, on the grounds of age. For employers, the new law will have far-reaching implications on almost all aspects of employment, from recruitment to dismissal, pay and benefits to training, redundancy and retirement.

Importantly, the right not to be discriminated against applies to all employees whatever their age and when recruiting, employers will need to be wary of using words such as 'young' or 'energetic' on adverts as it has been suggested that this may indirectly disadvantage older applicants. Also, think about advertising as widely as possible – e.g., on community noticeboards and the internet as well as at job centres.

Compelling staff to retire below the age of 65 will, in most cases, be outlawed and the upper age limit of 65 for unfair dismissal and redundancy claims will be removed. There will be a justification to directly/indirectly discriminating on the grounds of age, namely where it can be considered a 'proportionate' means of achieving a legitimate aim. However, employers should note that this defence is of limited scope.

Although discriminating on the grounds of age is not unlawful until October, it is undoubtedly worth preparing for the changes now. Employers are advised to review their policies and practices and renegotiate contractual terms and benefits which will fall foul of the new legislation.

Compensation awards for a successful age discrimination claim could potentially be large. Therefore, if one area of employment law demands your attention, it is this one. We would recommend that operators review their business' age profile (including recent applicants) to identify a proposed plan of action to deal with the new law.



Drivers may be driving later in life by law when regulations land in October

FACT FILE

- **www.efa.org.uk**
  (for an example of an age-neutral application form)
- **www.bondpearce.com/publications/bppubs072005_09.pdf**
  (for a more detailed account of the proposed Age Discrimination Regulations)

DISABILITY DISCRIMINATION REDEFINED

SINCE December 5, 2005, the definition of 'disability' has been extended by virtue of the Disability Discrimination Act 2005.

Persons with progressive conditions such as MS, HIV and cancer are now classed as having a disability, while those seeking to show a mental impairment no longer have to demonstrate that it is a clinically well-recognised illness. Employers will therefore need to be extra careful when considering the need to make any reasonable adjustments for people who are considered to be disabled.

BOND PEARCE

PETER WOODHOUSE is a partner in the Bond Pearce Transport team and deals regularly with road and passenger transport issues. He is a specialist advocate with full rights to appear in all courts and tribunals in the UK. Peter has a particular interest in employment matters in the transport sector. He can be contacted on 0117 929 9197 or by email *pwoodhouse@bondpearce.com*

GRIEVANCE LETTERS LESS FORMAL

WHEN an employee has a grievance, they must raise it with their employer. But it may not need to be such a formal process anymore.

Towards the end of last year the Employment Appeal Tribunal indicated a flexible approach to the question of what constitutes a grievance letter. In two landmark cases, it was decided that a letter from the employee's solicitor can instigate a grievance procedure and it does not matter if this letter includes other matters or fails to expressly mention the word 'grievance'.

Email correspondence can now also constitute a written grievance. These developments highlight the importance of complying with the statutory procedures on grievances (as well as those on dismissals and disciplinary issues) that have been in place since October 2004.

WORKERS RIGHTS TO BE INFORMED

LAST April saw the implementation of the Information and Consultation of Employees Regulations for those employers with more than 150 employees.

So far little has been heard about these Regulations which may mean that employees are quite content with the way in which they are consulted. Those employers with more than 100 employees will be required to comply with the Regulations as from 2007, and 2008 sees the Regulations applying to all those with more than 50 employees.

In essence, the Regulations give employees at such organisations the right to request the negotiation of an agreement regarding information and consultation in the workplace. In particular, employers may need to inform and consult on key management decisions affecting the business such as financial changes, structure of staff and job transfers/redundancies.

TAKEOVER TRANSFER RULES FOR STAFF TO CHANGE

THE LONG-awaited amendment to the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981 ('TUPE') is now due to be implemented this April. The final version is likely to:

- Clarify the situations when TUPE applies;
- State when terms of employment can be changed;
- Confirm the position on dismissals for transfer-related reasons;
- Place obligations on the old employer to notify the new employer of employment liabilities and
- Allow greater flexibility in the application of TUPE to insolvency situations.

Meanwhile, the Pensions Act 2004 has already dealt with the issue of pensions on a transfer and indeed, makes all the more stark the delay in bringing in the new TUPE regulations.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT EXTENDED

BY VIRTUE of the Employment Equality (Sex Discrimination) Regulations 2005, there has, since 1 October 2005, been a definition of sexual harassment, in addition to harassment on the grounds of sex.

The government considers that the new rules will make claims for harassment more straightforward as male/female employees will no longer be required to find a comparator of the opposite sex in order to base a claim.

PERSONALITY DISMISSALS?

A CASE that made the news last November was Perkin v St Georges Healthcare NHS Trust.

The Court of Appeal extended the ambit of the 'some other substantial reason' heading for a potentially fair dismissal by declaring that a personality clash, while not in itself a ground for dismissal, can become a fair reason if an employee's abrasive character 'manifests itself in the workplace.' Nevertheless, employers should keep in mind that the carrying out of a reasonable procedure is still paramount to a fair dismissal.

Improved parental care provision will come with the Work and Families Bill

OTHER CHANGES

- From October 2005, the national minimum wage for those over 21 increased to £5.05 an hour;
- From 1 February 2006, the maximum compensatory award at an Employment Tribunal will be increased to £58,400;
- From 1 April 2006, standard maternity, paternity and adoption pay will be increased to £108.85 a week.

PARENTAL AND 'CARE' LEAVE RULES TO COME

ALSO anticipated for October is legislation to improve the rights of employees for maternity leave, paternity leave, flexible working and paid Bank holidays.

The Work and Families Bill is currently before Parliament and, when implemented, will provide for Regulations to:

- Introduce a right to additional paternity leave where the mother returns to work early (enabling fathers to benefit from leave and statutory pay);
- Make the right to a flexible working request available to Carers of both children and adults;
- Improve the business administration of maternity, paternity and adoption pay.

Presently, there is a right to two weeks' paid paternity leave and 13 weeks' unpaid parental leave.

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Cc... The Editor, *CBW*, 3 Office Village, Cygnet Park, Hampton, Peterborough, PE7 8FD

MAYBE ARCHER HAD A POINT...

From: Richard Cranmer, Co Durham

SINCE Archer wrote his piece on the Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport (CBW 15 December), two readers have questioned his comments in the subsequent two editions. I should like to give Archer's comments a cautious welcome, however, although I do not necessarily share Archer's reasons for his viewpoint. Maybe it is time to re-evaluate what the CILT actually does for the bus and coach industry, as Geoff Newton's response (*CBW* January 5) fails to give any sound reason for joining.

I have been a Chartered Member of this institute (and its predecessor) since 1992, and I would say that my subscription has been a wholly wasted expense throughout this time. The only reason I maintained my membership was to ensure that my CPC remained valid. Now that this is no longer necessary for me, I have cancelled my membership. Perhaps an organisation like CPT could (or should) form an association that provides similar services that are more relevant to us all.

The CIT, and the CILT even more, has always had at its core a bias towards freight transport, and I can remember only two articles in its magazines in 15 years that I have found useful. Senior bus industry managers do not use it – proof of this is the complete absence of PSV job advertisements.

CBW, by contrast, is a far more worthwhile expenditure – more educational, more informative, is published four times as often as the CILT's magazine, and is half the price!

POLE POSITION IN THE ROUTEMASTER

From: Phil Hoskins

I would like to say how much I enjoyed the *CBW* study tour to Krakow, and I certainly learned a few new ideas from that.

My partner Ewa and myself did not fly back with the party, but went on to spend a week's holiday in Warsaw, where Ewa was raised.

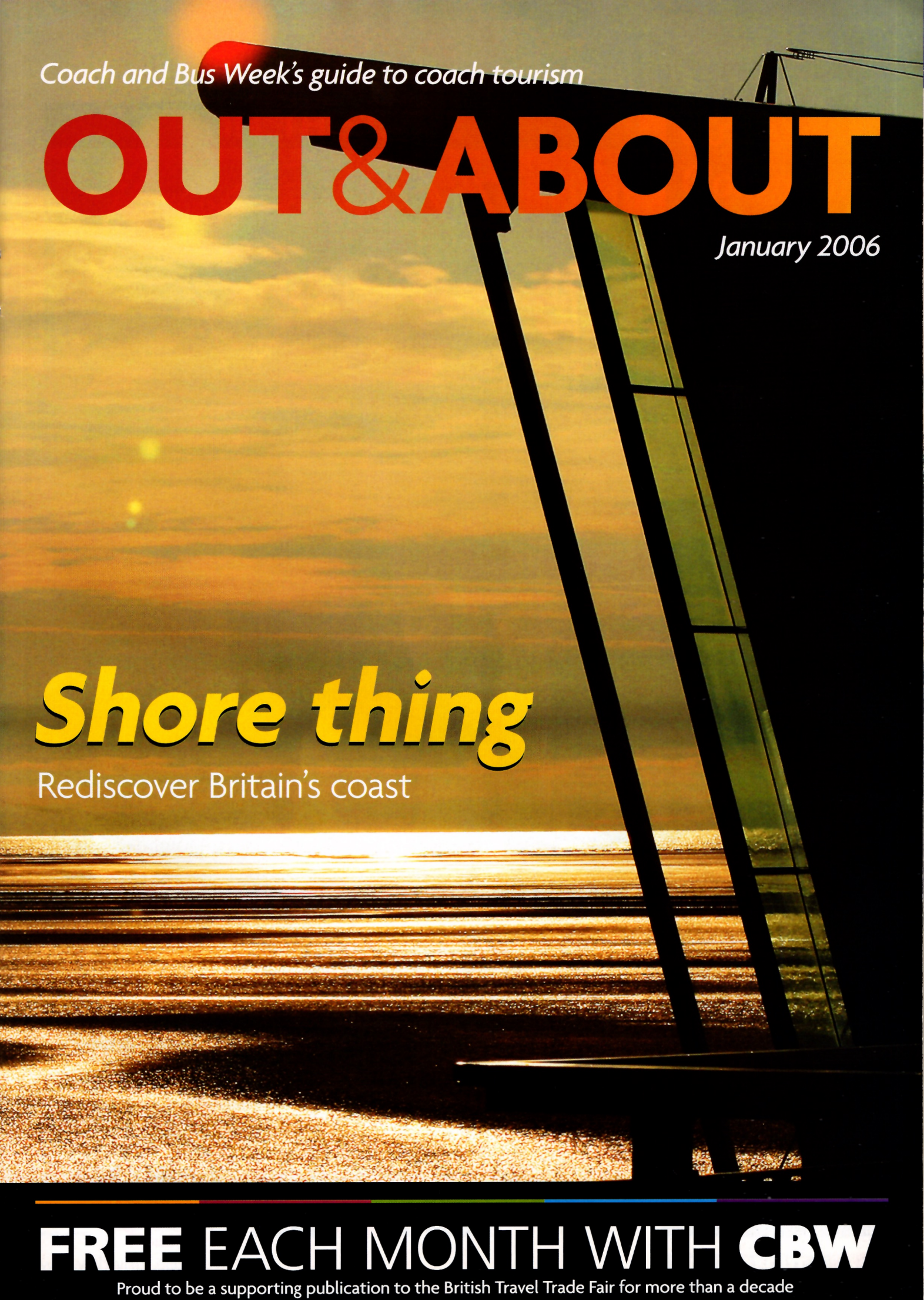
If Arriva ever set up there or take over a Polish operator, I will certainly try to get a job there.

Connex are already running in Warsaw.

On returning from Poland I was involved with the end of the Routemaster on route 159, which was an event indeed. The 159 had been one of my routes as a driver in the 1980s, so I was very honoured when Arriva's management offered me a duty on gold RM6 on the last full day of operation, Thursday, December 8. Ewa and myself crewed up together for the day,

sharing both the driving and conducting.

Considering Ewa had only driven a Routemaster once before, and I had driven her over the route in a VLA the night before, she coped extremely well, and we were both very proud to have taken part in the making of London's history. On the Friday, we were on duty outside Brixton Garage on croud control, and as such witnessed the last buses in service. We were part of the huge crowd everybody saw on the media. Remarkably, news even reached Warsaw, where Ewa's family called us to say they had seen the event on the news. There was a comment that a woman was seen driving a golden bus (women drive trams, but not buses, in Poland). If only the Polish media had known the full story, namely that the woman is herself Polish. Having said that, the lack of privacy as the media scrambled for interviews would have been the downside.



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- Eurotunnel conditions of carriage and full ticket terms apply which are available on request

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IN THIS ISSUE

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How Southport is emerging from the shadow of brassy neighbour Blackpool to attract coach parties

6-8 Great days out
From art festivals to zoos, Bill Golden takes a look around the country to bring you the best destinations for a great day trip deal

13-15 Wholesale deals
Let someone else do all the planning by signing up for a wholesale package. We take a look at deals including a tour of New Zealand and a visit to the Christmas market in the beautiful old city of Tallinn in Estonia

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OUT&ABOUT Comment

WELCOME to the first *Out&About* of 2006, and a New Year which I hope will see the coach tourism industry building on 2005's successes.

And whichever way you cut it, 2005 was a successful year, not least because it confounded the nay-sayers who told us that no-frills airlines would rob operators of all their customers. You only had to think about that for ten minutes to realise that it was illogical bunk; with many of our most loyal customers heading into their 70s and even 80s, the idea that they'd fancy carting their luggage around airports and in and out of cabs for six hours of their holiday was a non-starter.

Some of the more imaginative operators decided that their central role was as holiday suppliers rather than transport providers, and offered flight-based packages in additional to traditional tours. I won't bang on about this too much, I promise, but if you haven't researched this lucrative market with your wholesaler yet, you really should.

This year, the Coach Tourism Council launches an imaginative and impressive assault on the market, promoting the best aspects of coach touring to a public which is largely ignorant of the advantages of land travel. *CBW* and *O&A* will be providing its full support to the campaign, and I hope readers will do their bit.

For if there was a downside to 2005, it was the late booking pattern and low margin. The answer to both is marketing, and at *O&A* we will make it our business to help you provide more imaginative product.... and better ways of getting our message across.

● I must tender my apologies that this month's issue is back inside *CBW*; a temporary measure due to arrangements at the printer. Normal service will be resumed in the next issue, which will be a standalone publication.

Mark Williams

Partnership facing up to challenges

Industry set for another tough year – but wholesalers hope to make it easier

IT'S another year and another set of challenges for the coach industry as it gears up for another year of hard graft. And many of them will know that the success of their tour programmes this year will come down to careful planning, a process that can be eased considerably by working with a wholesaler.

Most of the leading wholesalers belong to the British Association of Wholesale Agents (BAWTA) and chairman Sean Taggart, who is also managing director of the Albatross Travel Group, the Kent based wholesaler, is only too aware of the need for synergy between wholesalers and coach operators.

"There is no segment of the industry that is more dedicated, or reliant upon, the success of coach tourism than the wholesale industry," says Taggart, "so naturally we believe that we have a key role to play in driving and sometimes challenging the whole industry."

Just as important is innovation and Taggart cites the diversity of the 2006 winter and early 2007 products from wholesalers as examples. "Take my own company, the Albatross Travel Group," he says. "Our staff are constantly looking out for new destinations and refining existing products to give operators the best service and value for money. Now we are looking even further afield and organising tours to New Zealand."

It is a pattern that is being reflected across BAWTA, adds Taggart. "Since the association was formed in 1987, the brief has been to channel its belief in the future of coach tourism into major initiatives."

One of the more recent of those initiatives has been the Coach Tourism Show, which Taggart cites as further proof of that successful partnership between wholesalers and coach operators. This year's event, which is being held at Stoneleigh in Warwickshire on May 17 and 18, will be combined with the first Coach Tourism awards event, which will be held at the nearby Ricoh Stadium, the new home to Coventry City Football Club. There will be 14 awards in all, covering everything from European Holiday Programme of the Year to Manager of the Year,

"Now in its fourth year, Coach Tourism has become a firmly established event on the tourism calendar," says Taggart, "and the awards are an exciting new element. They will drive the show forward and help to further promote it to the industry."

So Taggart and BAWTA are looking forward to 2006 with confidence. "Last year was challenging for many coach operators," he says, "but the coach tourism industry is nothing if not resilient and I am optimistic about the year ahead. As wholesalers, we have great products to sell to a discerning market and, as an organization, BAWTA will continue to strive to raise standards across the board.

● For details about Coach Tourism 2006, go to *www.coachtourism.com*. For more information about BAWTA, go to *www.bawta.co.uk*

Norman Allen buoyant on back of strong bookings

THE optimism of Sean Taggart (see above) is reflected by an end of year report from Norman Allen Group Travel, which is reporting growing confidence following an excellent season in 2005.

With last year's average passenger numbers holding up and a marked drop in cancelled tours, the wholesaler anticipates a good result in 2006, and there are some positive signs to back this up.

A poll of the coach tour operators whose brochures were launched in the early autumn shows average tour sales are better than last year, and this is especially true for the more unusual (and often most expensive) destinations, such as Norway and Eastern Europe.

It is these tours that have already been requested by operators for 2007 and Norman Allen Group Travel has more advance business already booked for the following year than at any previous time.

Paul Mallon, the company's managing director, says: "The booking season has taken another big leap forwards, with requests for 2007 coming in late 2005. We can see a point where, by late spring, a proportion of our business for next year will already be in place, and availability for key dates and special events will largely be taken up'.

To this end, the wholesaler will be producing a Preview brochure in late February that will detail new tour ideas for 2007 and will be available at the British Travel Trade Fair at the NEC in Birmingham on March 1 and 2.

New products are currently being worked on for European, Irish and British destinations. On the home front, full hotel details will now be given, as is already the case for Continental tours.

Bronwyn Neal, the UK tours sales manager, is aiming to offer more country house and privately run hotels as tour bases, with less reliance on the major hotel chains. She is increasing the number of Luxury Break tours where clients are treated as individuals by hotels but still benefit from competitive rates.

In Europe, the success of the longer tours, will lead to more choice for 2007, especially in Eastern Europe, where there has been a real surge of interest in the last two years. Some new products are being developed in France, Switzerland, Austria and Germany and, in 2007, the company will offer an even greater proportion of European hotels with buffet breakfast and dinner menu choice included as standard.

For more information about these and other tours, contact Norman Allen Group Travel on 01432 277666 (fax 01432 352041) or email: *normanallen@group-travel.com*. Alternatively, go to *www.group-travel.com*

● **More news from wholesalers – see page 17**

Join the musical garden party

BIG bands, classical music and tribute groups are on the menu at the annual Wisley Music Festival, which stages four nights of concerts and fireworks from June 7 to 10 at RHS Wisley in Surrey. The gardens provide a perfect setting for the concerts and groups of ten or more qualify for discounted admissions and there are concessions for drivers.

The entertainment starts on Wednesday June 7 when the *Glenn Miller Orchestra* swings into action. Enjoy all the classic hits such as In the Mood and American Patrol before listening to *Louis Hoover* as he salutes Frank Sinatra.

On Thursday June 8 *Hayley Westenra*, the teenage singing sensation from New Zealand, tops the bill and is supported by *Tenors Unlimited* and the *National Symphony Orchestra*.

There is a change of mood on Friday June 9 when *Dancing in the Streets*, celebrates the music of Motown. If you love soul, then you will enjoy classics from the Supremes, the Four Tops and Martha & the Vandellas brought to the stage by the cast of the show of the same name that has been playing to packed houses in the West End.

The festival comes to a rocking end on Saturday June 10 when *Ultimate Earth Wind and Fire* and *Killer Queen* pay tribute to two top bands of the '70s and '80s.

Concert tickets cost £29.50 and groups of ten or more qualify for a ten per cent discount. There is free coach parking and drivers receive free admission and a voucher for a sandwich and drink. Customers may purchase drinks and light snacks. For picnic hampers and pre-concert dining in the Wisley Restaurant, call 01483 225949. Call 0870 421 4868 for corporate hospitality.

RHS Gardens Wisley is just off the M25 at Junction 10. Take the A3 towards Guildford and follow the brown signs. Gates open nightly at 5.30pm and concerts start at 7.30pm with fireworks at approximately 10.15pm.

For bookings and more information, call the group line on 020 7014 8444 (no booking fee) or go to *www.rhs.org.uk/gardens/wisely*

Eurotunnel 'on track for further success'

AFTER a period of restructuring in 2005 that saw a number of job losses, Eurotunnel is looking forward to a year of challenges – it seems to be catching – in 2006. The Channel Tunnel operator has followed up its commercial changes last year by introducing a programme called Focus on Customers that will review the service provided to coach operators and other shuttle customers.

As a consequence Eurotunnel will be bringing in improvements in the way that customers are welcomed and informed and how traffic flow will be managed. The last month has also seen the introduction of 24 automatic check-in lanes at both terminals on either side of the Channel. The strategy is all part of a long-term plan to increase traffic flow at peak times and adapt the service throughout the day to suit the changing needs of passengers.

Last year saw was a good year for Eurotunnel with an increase in coach traffic through the tunnel, thanks in no small part to the problems at Calais in the early part of the year that hit ferry services from Dover.

Eurotunnel hopes the tone for the year ahead was set on Monday, January 2 when it carried 110 coaches and more than 7,000 cars, more than double the volume handled on an average day.

During the day there were 60 departures from the Coquelles terminal – one every 15 minutes at peak times – and company bosses hopes that such early success can be sustained.

Seek and you shall find

Day trips remain a mainstay of a coach operator's programme. William Golden suggests a variety of destinations that should appeal to your customers

IT is one thing to plan an extensive touring itinerary for the year, but many operators find that day excursions provide the bread and butter during a year of coaching. There always will be a group or society keen to look at a garden, plan a trip to a zoo, go shopping or take in a special event. Here is a selection of destinations that might appeal.

Horn of plenty: this rhino is one of the endangered species cared for at Paignton Zoo

Join the zoo quest for endangered species

SPREAD over an 80-acre site, Paignton Zoo is home to some of the world's most endangered plants and animals. The zoo is divided up into six zones – Primley, savannah, forest, wetland, tropical forest and desert – all of which represent world habitats, except for Primley, which is an area in the zoo where animals from a mixture of habitats live.

Plants are fundamental to the zones and this is one of the reasons that Paignton Zoo is not just a zoological garden but also a botanical garden. The plant collections contain around 5,000 specimens representing about 1,500 different plants. Some of the most rare plants in the world are grown in the gardens. Paignton Zoo is open every day (except Christmas Day) and welcomes groups of any size, at any time, and booking is not essential.

Groups of 15 or more are entitled to discounted admission of £7.60 for adults, £6.40 for senior citizens and £4.75 for children from three to 15. Prices will increase at Easter in line with the new summer rates. For more information go to *www.paigntonzoo.org.uk*

Seeing stars in Birmingham

THE new Planetarium at Thinktank, the award-winning Birmingham science museum at Millennium Point, is proving an out-of-this-world hit with visitors. More than 3,000 stargazers have packed the Planetarium since it opened just before Christmas.

Planetarium manager Mario Di Maggio says: "Visitors are excited to gain practical knowledge they can use from home when they step outside. We have distributed hundreds of information leaflets about the current night sky and lots of people are joining our free mailing list. The only problem we have had is coping with demand on some days."

Thinktank has the UK's first purpose-built digital Planetarium, seating up to 70

Festival proves a big draw

ORGANIZERS of the Shrewsbury International Cartoon Festival have big ideas as they finalize the full programme for the 2006 event, which will be held from April 21 to 23. With three high-profile patrons now on-board, the dual themes for 2006 have been announced as Germany and Size.

The latter was selected after Shrewsbury hit the headlines for having both the world's tallest town crier, Martin Wood, and the UK's tallest MP, Daniel Kawczynski. As well as being able to boast the world's tallest Doric column, Shrewsbury also gave birth to the skyscraper, thanks to the successful construction of the world's first iron-framed building, The Flax Mill.

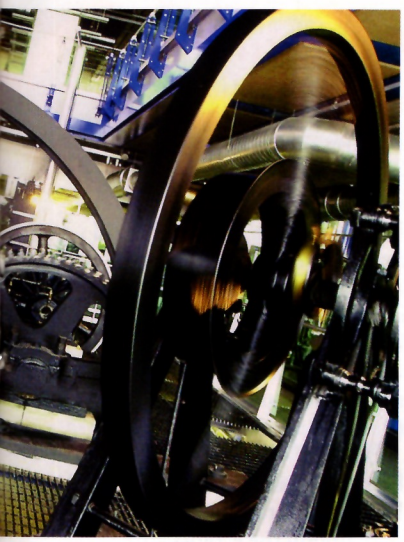
Participating cartoonists will have the opportunity to 'Go Large' on several occasions during a weekend of laughter and mirth. An exhibition of their work on the theme Size is Everything will be held at the Bear Steps Gallery, while many artists will contribute big cartoons that will be drawn on big boards in The Square underneath the Old Market Hall.

A Best of German Cartoons exhibition – if that is not an oxymoron – will be held in Pride Hill under the title of XXL and will show off work by the best contemporary German cartoonists. German cartoonist Peter Ruge will contribute to both themes with an exhibition of life-sized cartoons made of fabric at Rowley's House.

Organizers are planning to add to the atmosphere of the weekend by arranging 'Have-a-go' workshops for children and families, 'Cartoon Clinics' for aspiring artists, political cartooning and stand-up comedy with cartoons.

Celebrity guests will include humorist Alan Coren, Radio 4 broadcaster Libby Purves, and Colin Pillinger, the head of Planetary & Space Sciences at the Open University and principal instigator of the ill-fated Beagle 2 project.

Further details about the 2006 Shrewsbury International Cartoon Festival can be found at *www.cartoonshrewsbury.com.*



Mars bars: enjoy the interactive exhibits and planetary exploration at the Thinktank in Birmingham

visitors per show (with additional room for four wheelchair users), under a projection dome that is ten metres in diameter. The Planetarium is open to Thinktank visitors only, as part of their museum visit, and there is an extra charge of £1 per person. The museum expects demand for Planetarium shows to continue to be high and is urging visitors to book in advance by phoning the box office on 0121 202 2222.

The Planetarium is in Thinktank's new look Futures gallery that features unique interactive exhibits, including Create an Alien and Mission to Mars. Thinktank opened in 2001 and explores the impact of science and technology on our lives in the past, present and future.

Going ape in Stoke

THERE is some monkey business awaiting groups who visit Britain's first Monkey Forest based at Trentham, the multi-activity attraction that is costing in the region of £100 million to create.

The Monkey Forest now covers 60 of the estate's 750 acres and is home to around 140 Barbary Macaques, who have been settling into their new surroundings for the past six months and are now happily welcoming visitors into their supervised enclosure.

Brought to Trentham from similar forests in France and Germany, which have been run by the de Turkheim family for the past 30 years, the monkeys are part of an endangered species, and are being cared for by a team of 50 workers and volunteers, including qualified zoologists. Members of the public can pay to stroll through a section of the Monkey Forest (£5 adults and £3.50 children).

Famed in particular for its gardens, the full Trentham complex also features ten new marked Woodland Walks for the public to enjoy free of charge. While trips across the lake are now available on board a 50-seater catamaran, another first is the recently opened Barefuss-Park, which can be 'enjoyed' by anyone visiting the gardens.

Derived from the teachings of a Bavarian priest, Father Sebastian Knipp, the Barefuss-Park is a well-being walk – undertaken barefoot over and through bark, pine cones, gravel, sand, grass and mud.

A garden centre and shops have been open since Christmas 2004 and later this year a food court area and top quality restaurant will be opened. And work is well under way on the complex's first on-site hotel – a 120-bedroomed three star family hotel. This will open its doors later in 2006.

Other developments planned for Trentham include a Winery, 75 self-catering lodges, a butterfly farm, fishing academy, equestrian centre and an extreme sport activity centre.

For more details go to *www.trenthamleisure.co.uk*.

Go with the flow: enjoy monkeys and tranquil gardens at Trentham in Stoke-on-Trent

Serious retail therapy

BIRMINGHAM'S position as one of the leading shopping centres in Europe has been assured in recent years thanks to the opening the £500m Bullring and the creation of malls such as The Mailbox. Selfridges, Massimo Dutti, Karen Millen, Reiss, Yo Sushi and the Veuve Clicquot Champagne Bar are just a few of the shops and restaurants on site. The chic Mailbox has flagship stores such as Harvey Nichols, DKNY, Armani, Louis Vuitton and the House of Fraser.

With shopping now well established as Britain's most popular leisure-time pursuit, Birmingham is well placed to seek out something very special, or different to the norm. More than 1,000 shops, including five department stores, an abundance of designer boutiques and all the major high street names, make the city a shopper's dream. In addition to the many independent shops – including those housed within the eclectic Custard Factory – Birmingham is also home to the Jewellery Quarter, where handcrafted jewellery can be purchased or special designs can be commissioned. The historic quarter is home to more than 500 jewellery businesses operating in surroundings that date back 250 years.

For more information, go to *www.beinbirmingham.com*

Tiptoe through the snowdrops

THE Hodsock Priory Gardens (01909 591204) at Blyth are well worth a visit in the New Year. The priory has been home to the Buchanan family since 1765 and the 800-acre estate is transformed each year by the blankets of snowdrops that carpet the gardens. Wrap up warm and enjoy a stunning walk through this tranquil woodland before enjoying hot refreshments in the tearooms.

The priory is open from January 28 to March 5 and groups of 25 or more qualify for a discounted admission of £3.50 per person. Drivers receive a voucher for the tearooms. There is free parking.

Manor house that is open all year

IF you are planning a day trip to a stately home and want something a little different, check out Saint Hill Manor on the outskirts of East Grinstead, West Sussex. The stately home is reputed to be one of the finest 18th century sandstone buildings in the area and is one of the few historical attractions that is open to the public throughout the year.

Built in 1792, Saint Hill Manor has had a succession of owners, from the Maharajah of Jaipur to the writer and philosopher L. Ron Hubbard, who founded the Church of Scientology that counts the film star Tom Cruise among its supporters. The manor offers a blend of Western and Eastern cultures, with its 12th century tiles and Arabic mosque door, and the 1940s cinema with its 100-foot Monkey Mural that was painted by Winston Churchill's nephew, John Spencer-Churchill.

Other features include the grand hallway with black Spanish marble pillars, the winter garden adjoining the Canadian red pine-panelled lounge and a library of L. Ron Hubbard's entire published works – no disrespect to Mr Hubbard or Mr Cruise but anybody who has read a page of his prose will find it interminably dull.

In addition to the staterooms, there are 59 acres of gardens that are open daily to the general public. Tour times are from 2pm to 5pm on the hour and admission is free, There is free coach parking and groups may pre-book cream teas at a cost of £3.50 per person.

For bookings and more information, call 01342 326711.

Picture palace: the stunning Monkey Mural in the cinema at Saint Hill Manor in East Sussex

Robin's quest: learn about outlaws and legends on a tour of Nottingham Castle

Castle keepsakes in Nottingham

GROUPS who are on a day trip to the city of Nottingham should find time to visit Nottingham Castle (0115 915 3700), which is a 17th century ducal mansion built on the site of the original medieval castle and spectacular views across the city. The museum and art gallery has collections of silver, glass, armour and paintings, plus fifteen centuries of Nottingham history. The galleries also bring the best regional, national and international artists' work to the city. The landscaped gardens offer a marked contrast to the network of tunnels running beneath the site that have played a key part in the castle's turbulent history.

Nottingham Castle will be one of the main exhibitors for the prestigious British Arts Show, which comes to the city from the 21 April to 25 June 2006. Exhibitions will be held at venues across the city.

Group admissions are £3 for adults and £1.50 for children and concessions, with one free ticket for every ten purchased. Cave tours cost £2 for adults and £1 for children and concessions. There is a coach drop-off point in front of the castle and parking is available close by.

Help to save the environment

IF you are taking a group on a short hop across the Channel, find time to visit Nausicca, the award-winning educational and environmental centre in Boulogne. Nausicaa reopens on January 27 after its three-week winter closing and will then run a series of special programme and events throughout the year.

The majority of these are themed on the central work of the centre, which is to highlight the dangers of pollution and show how man must work in harmony with his surroundings, particularly in relation to fishing the oceans of the world.

Regular attractions at Nausicaa include an array of display tanks that include sharks, a touch pool and an outdoor pool area where sea lions are fed daily. There is a good on-site restaurant and free coach parking nearby.

Self-guided admission rates for groups of 20 or more are 13 Euros (£8.60) for adults and seven Euros (£4.80) for children. Guided visits cost an additional 60 Euros for a maximum of 25 paying customers. Special tours are available for the same prices but for a maximum of 15 paying customers.

There is a good on-site restaurant and nearby free coach parking. Nausicaa is easily accessible from the A16 – follow the brown signs from the exit. For bookings and more information call 00 33 321 309989 or email: *bookings@nausicaa.fr*

Making merry with Robin Hood

NO trip to Nottinghamshire would be complete without a mention of Robin Hood and his Merry Men. The Sherwood Forest Visitor Centre (0845 330 4212) in Edwinstowe is at the heart of the Robin Hood legend and home to the Major Oak, the legendary hideout of the famous outlaw's band of Merry Men.

But Sherwood Forest is home to more than the legend. Dedicated foresters work to maintain the ecological balance of the ancient forest habitat, ensuring a haven for local wildlife.

Each summer Sherwood plays host to a week long Robin Hood Festival. The programme features jesters, jousters, music and children's theatre, strolling players, and costumed characters, plus outlaws. This year's event takes place from July 31 to August 6.

The visitor centre is home to permanent exhibitions on Robin Hood and the local environment, a gift shop and the Forest Table restaurant. The centre is open from 10am to 5pm in summer and from 10.30am to 4pm in winter.

Entry to Sherwood Forest Visitor Centre and to the Robin Hood Festival is free.

Coach parking is free all year round.

Pret å manger: the daily feeding of the sea lions is a highlight of a visit to Nausicaa in Boulogne

On the crest of a wave

Sunset beach: time for reflection on a walk along the beach at Southport at the end of the day

Pier pleasure: the refurbished Southport pier stretches a mile and is the second longest in Britain

In the second of our series on coach-friendly towns and cities, William Golden looks at how the resort of Southport puts out the welcome mat

ENGLISH resorts have had a difficult time in recent years, falling victim to the growth of low-cost airlines and the plethora of cheap packages holidays in European sunspots. However, a number of them are making a spirited fight back, particularly when it comes to attracting the potentially lucrative group market.

One resort that has been at the forefront of encouraging coach groups is Southport, which now attracts thousands of coaches a year even though it lies in the shadow of its bolder and brasher big sister, Blackpool. In 2004 nearly 6,000 coaches visited the resort, a significant increase on the previous year and continuing a trend that has seen coach and group travel business rise by 30 per cent in the last three years. Southport's initiatives were rewarded in 2004 when the resort was recognised as a Coach Friendly Town by the Confederation of Passenger Transport.

The coach initiative has been running alongside a multi-million pound investment scheme that has resulted in Southport having the second longest pier in Britain, a wide range of attractions for groups, entertainment centres and top-class shopping.

A dedicated team of coach hosts, who meet and greet coach groups and give them a rundown on the resort's facilities, sets the tone of a visit to Southport. Coach drivers are advised of the drop-off points throughout the resort and dedicated parking areas. They also benefit from a passport scheme that allows them to collect stickers for each visit, which can be redeemed for shopping vouchers. Their passengers also qualify for discounts.

The resort publishes an annual Group & Coach Travel Pack that helps coach operators and drivers plan a visit to the resort, which makes the most of its Victorian heritage, which is reflected in its architecture, glass vaulted shopping arcades, gardens, fountains and classic buildings.

The landmark attractions include the pier and pavilion and promenade and, once the sun goes down, groups can enjoy the thriving nightlife. There are three theatres, including the Southport Theatre and Floral Hall, a casino and a wide selection of bars, cafes and restaurants.

So operators heading for the northwest should give Blackpool a miss for a change and check out what Southport has to offer. They may be pleasantly surprised.

Licensed to thrill: have a head for heights and enjoy white-knuckle rides at the Pleasureland Theme Park

Attractions

ALL good resorts should have an amusement park and Southport is no exception. Pleasureland Theme Park boasts more than 100 rides and attractions, including five roller coasters, including the Traumatizer and the Cyclone. Admission to the park is free and visitors buy ride wristbands.

There is more family fun in the Lost Dinosaurs of the Sahara, the Desert Convoy and Sandstorm. Group meals are available at the Casablanca Restaurant and Pleasureland is open from March to the beginning of November. There is on-site coach parking.

Situated on the outskirts of Southport is the village of Churchtown, which is the oldest part of the resort. Pre-booked guided tours are available and Churchtown is home to Moels Hall and the Botanic Gardens, where groups can enjoy a relaxing stroll. The gardens are open from 8am to 30 minutes before dusk, seven days a week and there is free parking. Opened in 1874, these classic Victorian gardens are full of floral displays and wildlife and there is a winding lake that runs the length of the park.

One of the resort's most unusual attractions is the British Lawnmower Museum, in Shakespeare Street. The museum has more than 200 exhibits, some dating back to the 1830s and others belonging to diverse characters such as the Prince of Wales, Alan Titchmarch and Jean Alexander, alias Hilda Ogden from Coronation Street. The attraction can only accommodate small groups at any one time, so larger parties will have to stagger their visits.

The Eco Visitor Centre provides interactive demonstrations, shopmobility facilities, tourism information and has a fully equipped lounge for drivers.

Water sports enthusiasts should head for Crosby Marine where they can enjoy canoeing, sailing and windsurfing, while the Martin Mere Wildfowl & Wetlands Trusts is just on the outskirts of the resort.

Here visitors will find more than 100 species of rare and endangered ducks, geese and swans, an adventure playground and a nature trail.

Rufford Old Hall (01704 821254), near Ormskirk, is open from April to the end of September and groups can enjoy the spectacular Great Hall with its moveable wooden screen and hammer beam roof.

Shakespeare is claimed to have performed in the hall for the owner. The rest of the hall contains collections of 16th and 17th century furniture, arms and armour. The extensive grounds are laid out in Victorian style.

Back in the resort, head for the Marine Lake and take a 20-minute boat ride on the Southport Belle paddle steamer. The Mississippi-style boat runs daily from 11am to 5pm depending on the weather. Call 01704 539701.

Southport Pier is the second longest pier in Britain and has been refurbished at a cost of almost £7 million. There is a road train that travels the mile-long journey to the seaward end, where there is a pavilion and café. The pier is open daily from 10am to 7pm (9pm at weekends) and all the attractions are free.

If you want to round off a day in the resort with a live show, check out the programme at the Southport Theatre & Floral Hall complex on the Promenade. Regular shows and entertainments are run and there are discounts for groups.

Call the groups hotline on 01704 500036 for details of forthcoming attractions.

Groups who stay at the Scarisbrook have free use of leisure facilities

Accommodation

GROUPS who want to stay right in the centre of the resort should check out the Prince of Wales Hotel on Lord Street. The property has 143 newly refurbished bedrooms and two ballrooms and offers midweek dance breaks with special rates that include the use of a ballroom, a three-course carvery dinner and full buffet breakfast. Midweek packages start from £25 per person a night from January to March and from £35 in April. The hotel also offers groups three-course high teas from £8.50 per person. For more details, call Karan Maguire on 01704 533771.

On the Promenade, The Royal Clifton Hotel is 300 yards from the pier and 150 yards from Lord Street. Groups of 20 or more paying customers qualify for bed and breakfast rates from £25 per person a night and from £35 for half-board accommodation. Six single rooms are available at the agreed rate and, after that number has been exceeded, a £10 sole occupancy supplement applies.

The hotel has three banqueting suites that can cater from parties from 25 to 250 people.

For more information, call 01704 533771, email: *sales@royalclifton.co.uk* or go to *www.royalclifton.co.uk*

Group lunches are also on the menu at the Scarisbrook Hotel, where prices start from £9 per person. The hotel only takes groups – one at a time – from Sunday or Monday to Friday for four or five nights or occasionally shorter breaks. There is no group accessibility on Friday and Saturday nights.

Rates vary according to the time of year and range from £23 per person per night for dinner, bed and breakfast in January and February to £39 to £40 in the high season from May to September.

The Scarisbrook Hotel also has Turkey & Tinsel and Shopping breaks in November and December, with prices from £28 a night for half-board accommodation on Shopping breaks to £33 for Turkey & Tinsel breaks, which include entertainment and a festive dinner.

The hotel has a complimentary leisure club for residents that features a pool, multi-gym, Jacuzzi, sauna and steam room, sun bed and beauty studio.

For more information, call Carole, Denise or Anne-Marie on 01704 502583 or email *info@scarisbrickhotel.co.uk*

Shopping

FOR a relatively small town, Southport has a reputation for one of the more attractive shopping centres in the northwest. The compactness of the town makes it easy for shoppers to get around and the main retail outlets are to be found in Lord Street, a tree-lined, mile-long boulevard that boasts everything from high street names to specialist retailers. Nearby are more shops in Chapel Street, Eastbank Street, Tulketh Street, Wesley Street and King Street. And if you have any money left, head for the covered shopping malls such as the Wayfarers Arcade, Cambridge Walks, Cambridge Arcade and Marble Place.

On the outskirts of the centre is the Ocean Plaza, a seafront mix of retail and leisure outlets, or groups can visit Central 12. There also are retail parks at Meols Cop and Kew.

A market is held in the Market Hall in King Street and a Farmer's Market is held from 10am to 3pm on the last Thursday of the month, except December. It sells everything from ice cream to ostrich meat.

Itineraries

TOURISM officials in the resort are on hand to help groups get the best out of their visits. As a result, they have put together some sample itineraries. For example, *Shop Till You Drop* starts in the morning with a visit to the Ocean Plaza retail complex followed by a visit to Lord Street and a stroll along the seafront.

The Great Outdoors itinerary kicks off with bird watching, followed by a visit to the National Trust's Red Squirrel Reserve in Formby.

More energetic groups can opt for *Thrills & Spills* – a visit to the Pleasureland Theme Park, followed by a visit to the Grand National Experience at Aintree.

A gentler time is to be had on the *Family Fun* itinerary, which combines a morning visit to Pleasureland followed by an afternoon visit to the ten-lane Premier Bowl, Dunes Leisure Centre or Funland.

If *Peace & Tranquillity* is what your group is after, this itinerary starts with a walk through the Botanic Gardens, followed by a stroll along the pier, a walk around the Marine Lake or a trip on a paddle steamer.

Shop ahoy: Lord Street is the centre of attention for some high-class retail therapy

Special events

OPERATORS can look forward to a full programme of major events throughout the year, one or more of which can dovetail into a tour itinerary to the resort. The Meols Hall Garden & Leisure Show will be held from April 29 to May 1 in the ground of Meols Hall in Churchtown. Green-fingered enthusiasts will be able to admire show gardens, browse the trade stands, visit the food hall, savour celebrity cookery demonstrations and enjoy live music and entertainment. New for this year is an enhanced leisure, craft hobby and activity section.

Petrol heads will want to check out the rare cars and motorcycles at the North West Historic Motor Show, which is held in Victoria Park, Southport, from July 22 to 23. Advance tickets for groups are £5 for adults and £4 for senior citizens.

A week later sees Southport devoted to Summer Classics, when Victoria Park stages a full programme of music and entertainment from Friday to Sunday, July 28 to 30. Enjoy a picnic in the park and listen to celebrity musicians on the opening Friday – names have yet to be confirmed – and enjoy the Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra on the Saturday and Sunday together with a fireworks finale. Group rates have yet to be confirmed for the opening night but advance tickets cost £15 for adults and £13 for children from three to 16 on the Saturday and £5 and £4 respectively on the Sunday.

Courtney Pine, Jamie Cullum and Georgie Fame are among the big names who have appeared at the Southport Jazz Festival in recent years and organisers promise another star-studded line-up for this year's event, which runs from July 6 to 9. There are more than 70 gigs in 20 venues around the resort and 70 per cent of the events are free. Pre-booked groups qualify for discounts for ticketed events.

One of the biggest events on Southport's calendar is the annual flower show, which is the UK's largest independent such show and is a perennial favourite with coach groups.

The 2006 show is in Victoria Park from Thursday to Sunday, August 17 to 20. Tickets cost £16 on the gate but groups of 12 or more qualify for a pre-booked discounted price of £11.70 and parties of 21 or more qualify for tickets at £11.05 each. More information about timings and coach parking on *www.southportflowershow.co.uk*

The sky's the limit on Southport Beach in September when the Southport Air Show and Military Display is held on Saturday and Sunday, September 2 and 3. The event attracts up to 200,000 people over the weekend and the packed programme includes flights by military and civilian aircraft, the latest jets, vintage planes and helicopters. Advance tickets for groups are £5 for adults and children, a saving of £2 on the gate prices. More information at *www.southportairshow.co.uk*

If you want to see the sky at light, then make a date to catch the British Musical Fireworks Championships, when six of the top fireworks companies battle it out over the two days to produce the most spectacular displays, all synchronised to music.

The event is held in the Kings Gardens on Friday to Sunday, 22 to 24 September, and there is a full programme of entertainment before each night's battle of the big bangs. Advance tickets for groups are £4 for adults and children, a saving of £1 on the gate prices.

Southport also stages Continental markets where visitors can stock up on cheese, wine and other goods. The markets are from March 31 to April 2 and from July 14 to 16.

Lord Street is the place to be in December when a German Christmas Market is held from 14 to 17. The market is open from 10am to 4pm daily and there will be festive foods, stalls selling all kinds of gift ideas. Call 01704 395510 for more details.

The sky at light: enjoy spectacular displays during the British Musical Fireworks Championships in September

Coach parking

THERE are two coach parks, one on the Esplanade Park and Ride site and a second next to the Pleasureland Amusement Park. The charges are £3 per vehicle at each site. Drivers using the Esplanade site, which has CCTV coverage, have free use of the drivers' lounge at the Eco Visitor-Centre, so that they can make the most of their time after dropping passengers off at one of the designated points close to the main attractions in the resort. For more information call 0151 934 2711.

Help lines

FOR more information about visiting the resort, contact the Southport Tourist Information Centre, Lord Street, Southport PR8 1NY. Tel: 01704 533333, email: *info@visit-southport.com* or go to *www.visitsouthport.com* or *www.southportgrouptravel.com*

Groups may also pre-book guided tours of the resort that are conducted by Blue Badge Guides, who have a wealth of knowledge about the town and its history. Tours last for two hours and cost £3.50 per person. Book on 01704 395510 and call the same number for more information about group bookings for the events that run throughout the year.

As well as contacting the three featured hotels direct (see Accommodation panel), operators may book rooms via the call centre on 01704 533333.

A world of choice

IT'S another year and another challenge for the wholesaler industry. William Golden looks at how some of the leading companies are spreading their wings

Much has been written about the changing dynamics of holidays in recent years and the coach tourism industry has not escaped scrutiny. While the traditional coach holiday will remain the bedrock of the industry, the more go ahead companies are striving constantly to bring new ideas and programmes to their customers.

One of the big growth areas has been in air/coach holidays and the result has been coach customers travelling far and wide, aided in part by the operator's ability to sell split loads.

As the industry gears up for another season, the wholesalers have been quick to adapt to the needs of today's discerning coach operators and, as a consequence, they are planning well ahead with a range of tours at home and abroad that should dovetail into any operator's tour programme.

Albatross Travel Group

Expanded range for next winter

THE UK's largest wholesaler, the Albatross Travel Group, has expanded significantly the range of products available to coach operators for the winter 2006/07 season. As in previous years, operators will also have the added guarantee that all of the products promoted by Albatross have been personally visited, inspected and graded by a senior member of staff.

The Kent and Derbyshire based wholesaler has continued to build on the success of traditional winter packages, from House Parties through to traditional festive breaks and romantic weekends away.

Sean Taggart, the group's managing director, said: "Demand for Christmas and New Year packages has strengthened over the last couple of years and our product managers are working hard to keep up with demand, especially in Austria, Germany, Switzerland and Spain. We already have more packages available than ever before and I am sure that our selection will expand still further over the next few weeks."

In addition to traditional winter packages in the UK and mainland Europe, Albatross is launching a new range of winter air tours to a worldwide choice of destinations. The centrepiece of this range is a spectacular tour to New Zealand, which has been organised in conjunction with the wholesaler's own office in Brisbane. This tour and others in the range are being offered to coach operators as a shared departure and without the need for immediate booking deposits.

Clare Godden, Albatross's wholesale director, said: "Many coach operators are having to look further afield to generate sales in the winter months and we believe that this great new range of tours will offer them a real opportunity to spread their wings. We have deliberately created tours that are hard for passengers to replicate on their own and that offer a combination of key attractions and some that are more off the beaten track.

Winter warmers: the Christmas market in Tallinn is one of the Albatross destinations for next winter

"Offering operators the opportunity of sharing departures with others reduces the risk of tours not operating dramatically whilst ensuring that coach operators can maximise their income. We believe that, combined with a commitment to avoid initial booking deposits, this is a winning combination".

Other air tours planned for next winter include Christmas markets in the Baltic States and Poland, along with sunshine breaks to destinations such as Sicily and Spain.

For more information on these or any other winter offers from Albatross, call 01732 879191 or email: *sales@albatross-tours.com*

Wizards of Oz: Albatross's Brisbane office has helped organised tours to New Zealand

Botel

Selection box of goodies

FIREWORKS, house parties and mystery tours are among the unusual features of the new winter brochure from Botel, the Rotherham based wholesaler. The 44-page publication, which covers the period from November 2005 to March 2007, incorporates contemporary tour concepts together with the classic archetypal products, which are traditionally popular during the winter and spring periods

Among the striking tour ideas are UK Illuminations and Fireworks Breaks, Themed Welsh Breaks, Singles Breaks, Highland House Parties, Games Breaks, Platinum Weekend Breaks, UK & Continental City Breaks, Continental House Parties, Dutch Mystery Tours and Continental All Inclusive Packages.

A host of UK and Continental Christmas Markets are featured, alongside the carnival season on the Continent. The brochure also features the more obvious winter and spring product, including Turkey & Tinsel, Christmas, New Year, Valentine's Day, Mother's Day and Easter.

Chris Plummer, Botel's product manager, said: "While the traditionally popular winter tours continue to produce, over the past couple of years we have explored other avenues in creating a winter product. This has involved a great deal of research into seasonal events, and adding a theme, slight twist or added value to the tour."

In addition to the winter brochure, Botel's current Product portfolio includes a Summer 2006 brochure, covering April to October, a Disneyland Resort Paris programme, which runs to November 2006, Ireland – Enchanting Emerald Isle, a tour programme that runs through to December 2006, Portraits of Cologne, which is available until March 2006, and Ocean Cruising on the MV Van Gogh, which is available from May to December 2006.

On the back of the huge interest in the latest big screen version of Pride & Prejudice, Botel is also offering two themed packages. One is based in Hampshire and explores the life of Jane Austen, with visits to her birthplace and many of the places that inspired her. Prices start from £167 per person based on four nights' accommodation. The other package takes groups in the footsteps of the stars as it follows the locations used in the film. Prices start from £186 per person based on four nights' accommodation.

Botel is promoting Sunday night deals in Bruges, based at the centrally located Crowne Plaza Hotel. Combined with overnight sailings via the P&O Ferries service from Hull, the three-night package is available from £79 per person.

The company also launched recently a dedicated flyer in conjunction with Marriott Hotels, featuring four properties at Waltham Abbey, Swindon, Leicester (opening spring 2006), and Hollins Hall, near Shipley in West Yorkshire. A selection of Marriott Hotel & Country Clubs are available as Sunday Night Offers for £35 per person per night.

ICT Rising to the challenge

INDEPENDENT Coach Travel, the leading London wholesaler, has confirmed that 2005 was a challenging year but, in a difficult marketplace, the company fought off stiff competition and managed to hold its own at the forefront of the coach wholesaling industry.

Not one to rest on its laurels, ICT is looking ahead to 2006 with confidence and already has released some innovative products over the last two months, most of which are themed around recent or upcoming film releases. In anticipation of the Hollywood adaptation of bestseller The Da Vinci Code, ICT has launched an exclusive tour themed around the key Paris sights featured in the book and film. Customers can discover the events that took place in the Louvre and trace Langdon and Neveu's footsteps around Paris before heading to the Palace of Versailles. Prices for this four-day tour start from £105 per person.

If period drama appeals, then groups can opt for Darcy's England, a tour based on latest screen version of Pride & Prejudice. The programme explores some of the attractions in Lincolnshire and Derbyshire that featured in the film. The tour is centrally based in Nottingham and prices start from £149, including half-board accommodation and entrance to the featured attractions.

More tours are in the pipeline and details will be released soon. One will include a Rembrandt tour of The Netherlands that will uncover the life and works of the painter, as well as some of Amsterdam's leading attractions.

ICT's next focus is on the winter brochure for 2006/07. Tour sales from last year's brochure exceeded all expectations and much of the programme sold out quickly after the launch in March. Next winter's publication will be full of Christmas market breaks, both in the UK and Europe, Turkey & Tinsel breaks offers and unique themed breaks.

For details of ICT tours and offers, call 020 7538 4627.

Leisure Breaks

Green for go in Ireland

LEISURE Breaks, the Essex based wholesaler, has been building up a comprehensive programme of inclusive packages and tailor-made tours for groups, ranging from theatre breaks in the UK to short breaks and holidays across the UK and Europe. Destinations range from Belgium and France to Croatia, Denmark, Poland and Slovenia.

Nearer to home, one particular programme that has grown substantially in recent years has been Ireland and, in a very short space of time, Leisure breaks has become one of the leading providers of quality short breaks and holidays to the island. Two, four and six night tours feature in the Ireland section of its latest brochure and destinations include Galway and Connemara, the Ring of Kerry, Avoca and Wicklow, Cork and Crystal, the Giants Causeway and the excitement and buzz of Dublin itself.

In addition, Leisure Breaks has teamed up with Hilton Hotels to offer a special luxury, half-board, three night short break to the Mount Wolseley Hotel, Spa & Country Club. The former family home of the Wolseley family has been turned into a contemporary and luxurious hotel and lies in the rolling landscape of County Carlow. Facilities include a new holistic spa, treatment rooms, a chill-out pool, hydro jet water massage bed, swimming pool, gym, steam room and Jacuzzi.

Tours based in the hotel start from £189 per person in the low season and rise to £234 in the peak summer period. The price includes return HSS ferry crossing, a visit to the Irish National Stud and a guided tour of the Waterford Crystal factory.

Groups who want a short break in London can head down the river to Greenwich and take advantage of a special two-night break in the New Generation Novotel. Prices in the four-star property start from £59 per person and Leisure Breaks can enhance the break by booking tickets to a West End show or for a ride on the London Eye. Greenwich has a wide range of pubs and restaurants and there are some good markets. Attractions in the area include the Old Royal Naval College – designed by Sir Christopher Wren, the Royal Observatory in Greenwich Park, the National Maritime Museum and famous clipper ship, the Cutty Sark.

City exclusive: book early for some bargains in Edinburgh from Leisure Breaks

Leisure Breaks is also offering free accommodation to operators who book two theatre tickets for £80. Complimentary bed and breakfast in a central London hotel will be provided for bookings to see the new hit show, Sinatra at the London Palladium, and one of the hottest West End musicals, The Rat Pack, which is running at the Savoy Theatre. The offer, which is subject to availability, is for midweek performances until the end of May and includes one evening and one matinee performance.

Sinatra at the London Palladium is a new concept in theatre whereby footage of Frank Sinatra is combined with a 24-piece live orchestra, a company of dancers and special guests. Ground-breaking use of the latest digital film and stage technology lets Frank duet with live musicians on stage and sing directly to the audience. His image is projected on multiple screens and surfaces and is magnified to 20 feet.

For bookings and more information, contact Brian Huxtep on 01279 774400 or email *brian@leisurebreaks.com*

Irish elegance: relax with Leisure Breaks in the rural surroundings of the Mount Wolseley Hotel & Country Club

T4 Travel

Take a break

CAMBRIDGE based wholesaler T4 Travel has teamed up with Corus Hotels to provide special offers at four locations in the UK for short breaks in 2006. For a stay in the Midlands, the Himley Country Hotel is a hidden gem and was originally a 19th century schoolhouse. This village centre location on the Shropshire borders makes an ideal base for exploring the Black Country Museum, Kidderminster, Ironbridge, the Severn Valley railway or even the Potteries.

Further south, the Corus Hotel Romsey with its distinctive thatched roof is excellent for visits to Winchester, Southampton, Salisbury, The New Forest, and exploring the area that inspired Jane Austen. The Mid Hants Railway or Watercress Line is another popular attraction in the region.

The Corus Bristol is in relaxing surroundings with 16 acres of wooded countryside and boasts indoor and outdoor pools, tennis, squash and badminton, gym, aerobics studio and sauna-steam room.

In the northwest, groups can base themselves in Hoole Hall in Chester, which was designed in the 18th century and is set in landscaped gardens.

One T4 group recently enjoyed a visit to the Anderton Boat Lift, the world's first, built in 1875 as well as the Lowry Centre in Salford Keys.

Prices for these shorts breaks range from £67 in the Himley Country Hotel to £89 in the Corus Bristol. Rates include two nights' half-board accommodation, porterage and a welcome drink.

For more information call Erica, Dawn or Karen at T4 Travel on 01954 213 121 or go to *www.t4travel.co.uk*

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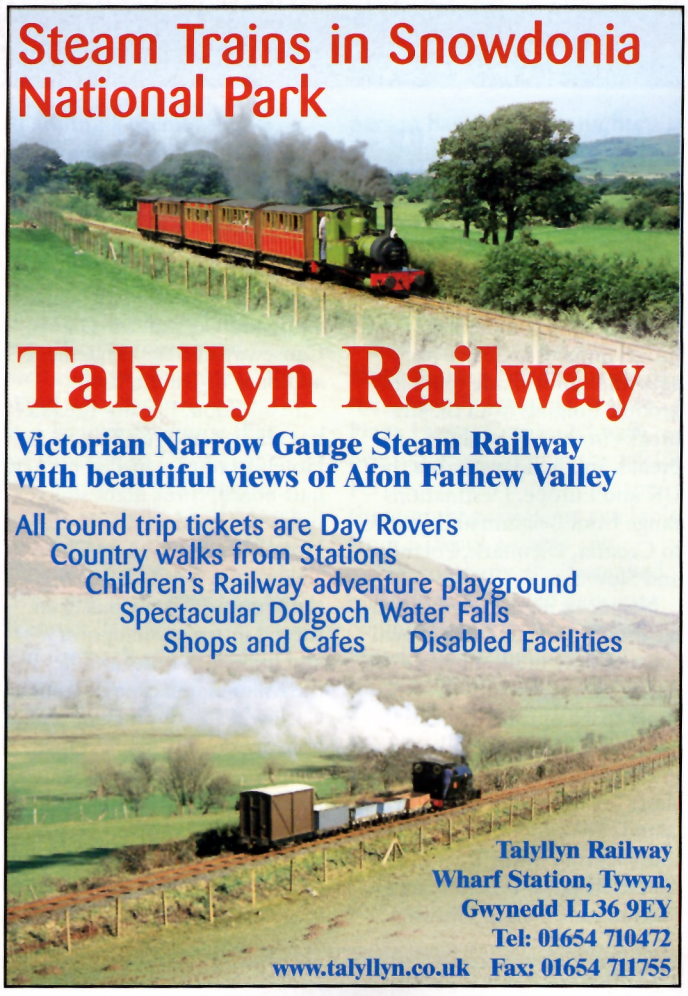
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Blackpool offer will not make you feel blue

THE brash resort of Blackpool is a popular coach group destination the year round and one hotel is hoping to banish the winter blues by offering some early season special offers.

The Big Blue Hotel, which opened at the south end of the Pleasure Beach a couple of years ago, is offering three night breaks for £129 per person based on sharing a Superior double room (twin rooms are also available). The hotel has 156 spacious and well-appointed bedrooms and groups may enjoy a cappuccino in the lobby or a gourmet meal in the Blues Bar and Brasserie.

Groups who take up this special offer will receive a VIP welcome from the hotel manager and unwind over a coffee while the luggage is taken to the rooms. Next morning, visitors can tuck into a full English breakfast before heading for the town centre for some shopping or sightseeing. There also is the option of an excursion to the genteel resort of nearby St Annes on Sea.

In the evening they will enjoy a two-course meal in the Blues Bar and Brasserie in the evenings while being entertained by the hotel's resident pianist and singers or violinist.

After the meal, there is the chance to win fantastic prizes as visitors play the Who'd like to be a Millionaire quiz or Big Blue Bingo. On the final morning, the hotel's staff and Manager will ensure that all luggage is taken to the coach while passengers eat their breakfast and the staff will then wave off the group on departure.

This special break is available from Friday to Monday nights from February 6 to 10 and 20 to 24 and March 6 to 10, 13 to 17, 20 to 24 and 27 to 31. To book call 0845 367 3333 and quote BBHCB.

● Blackpool Pleasure Beach, which is right on the hotel's doorstep, is Britain's most successful free to enter tourist attraction. The park is open from March to November and visitors may purchase an unlimited show and ride wristband. There is a full range of top shows in the summer and the principal rides include the Pepsi Max Big One and Valhalla.

Light and day: enjoy an early break in Blackpool and sample the towering nightlife

True blue: enjoy a group break in the shadow of the white-knuckle rides of Blackpool Pleasure Beach

Just click on for a gain in Spain

OPERATORS planning to book hotel space in northern Spain should be advised that Guitart Hotels has launched a new direct on-line reservation access for agencies. The company operates three and four-star hotels in and around Barcelona and a number of resorts, making them ideal bases for groups to tour this popular part of the country.

The reservations system is fully operative on the web page at *www.guitarthotels.com* and by clicking onto the left hand side menu for agencies, operators will be able to register on line and receive confirmation e-mail automatically. The email will indicate the access user name and password enabling him or her to enter the system and create reservations automatically. Access the menu at *www.guitarthotels.com/web/agencies*

Spanish eyes: new website will make it easier to book Guitart Hotels such as the Rosa

Staying at school makes economic sense in London

OPERATORS who plan trips to London through the year will be keen to find quality accommodation at affordable prices.

The secret is to find rooms in or near the centre that do not break the bank. One option is to stay in the halls of residence on a university campus. For example the London School of Economics, which counts Mick Jagger among its alumni, is right in the middle of the capital and offers twin rooms from £50 a night and single rooms from £31 a night.

Residences are available from March 18 to April 22 and from July 1 to September 23. There is a free place for the driver.

The London School of Economics has various sites across central London and facilities vary, but a good number of rooms have en-suite facilities and offer bed and breakfast.

For bookings and more information call 020 7955 7575 or email: *vacations@lse.ac.uk*.

Alternatively, visit *www.lsevacations.co.uk*

Don't miss the boat

A LAVISH new production of *Showboat* is being performed in the round at the Royal Albert Hall in London from June 13 to 25 and Leisure Breaks, the Essex based wholesaler, is launching special overnight packages for groups.

Two price bands are on offer – midweek (Monday to Thursday) at £79.50 per person and weekend breaks at £84.50 per person. Both rates include top price stalls tickets and four-star accommodation with full English breakfast in London's Docklands.

Call Leisure Breaks on 01279 774400 or email: *brianh@leisurebreaks.com*

Rapid-fire: comedian Ben Elton

Get a grip on Ben Elton

MOTORMOUTH comedian Ben Elton is on his first UK tour for eight years and fans in Manchester will have a chance to catch him in the act at the Palace Theatre on Saturday February 11. The date is one of the extra ones added to his *Get a Grip* tour, which is playing to full houses up and down the country.

Tickets are a flat £19.50 each and operators who want to buy tickets for groups should call the box office on 0870 401 3000.

Mine a rich seam of dance

BE on your toes and take advantage of a special ticket offer to see *Billy Elliot* at the Victoria Palace by calling the *CBW* Ticketmaster groups line. The offer is valid until April 1 and groups of 15 or more qualify for £10 off top priced tickets for Monday to Thursday evening performances and Thursday matinees.

If you want a taste of *Fame* at the Aldwych, groups of ten or more qualify for best available seats reduced to £15 for Monday to Friday evening performances and Friday and Saturday matinees.

Over at the Palace Theatre, be intrigued by *The Woman in White* where groups of ten or more qualify for best available seats reduced to £25 for Monday to Friday evening performances, and reduced to £22.50 for Wednesday matinees.

CBW
ticketmaster
0870 0602326

WEST END MUSICALS NOW PLAYING

ADELPHI
Chicago This razzle-dazzle of a show shows no signs of running out of steam. Enjoy a stirring tale of love and murder in the Windy City. Sally Ann Triplett plays Roxie Hart until January 28.
Booking to: February 25
Box Office: 08704 030303

ALDWYCH
Fame. Wannabes sing and dance and hope to live forever.
Booking to: April 29
Box office: 0870 4000 805

APOLLO VICTORIA
Saturday Night Fever Time to turn off the strobe lights as this old warhorse comes to the end of its run next month.
Booking to: April 29
Box office: 0870 400 0650

CAMBRIDGE
Dancing in the Street Audiences will certainly be dancing in the aisles as Motown magic fills the stage.
Booking to: April 6
Box office: 0870 890 1102

DOMINION
We Will Rock You Queen tribute must be one of the loudest shows in town.
Booking to: April 29
Box office: 0207 413 1165

DRURY LANE
The Producers. John Gordon Sinclair plays Leo Bloom in the bad taste but funny Mel Brooks comedy.
Booking to: October 28
Box office: 0870 890 1109

HER MAJESTY'S
The Phantom of the Opera. Not a ghost of a chance of this ending.
Box office: 0870 899 3342

LYCEUM
The Lion King Family musical is set to run and run. Disney magic at its best and an ideal show in run-up to Christmas.
Booking to: October 1
Box office: 0870 152 1000

NEW LONDON
Blue Man Group This surreal show is proving as popular here as in New York. Run has been extended to the autumn.
Booking to: September 3
Box office: 0870 890 0141

PALACE THEATRE
The Woman in White David Burt has taken over from Simon Callow as Count Fosco in the loose adaptation of the Wilkie Collins novel.
Booking to: April 1
Box office: 0207 494 5555

PHOENIX
Blood Brothers Maureen Nolan heads cast in Willy Russell's tearjerker that has been playing for 18 years.
Booking to: March 4
Box office: 0800 614 903

PICCADILLY
Guys & Dolls Dirty Den Junior – Eastenders' Nigel Harman – in fine voice as Sky Masterson.
Booking to: March 4
Box office: 0870 060 6630

PRINCE EDWARD
Mary Poppins. The magical nanny delivers the goods in this smash show. Laura Michelle Kelly stars.
Booking to: April 1
Box office: 0207 494 5048

PRINCE OF WALES
Mamma Mia! Funny how a group that was considered irredeemably naff in the Seventies should prove such a stage hit.
Booking now to January 27, 2007.
Box office: 0870 850 0393

QUEEN'S
Les Miserables. Les Miserables This is turning into a West End perennial. Booking period now extended to the end of next year.
Booking to: December 16, 2006.
Booking to: April
Box office: 0870 899 3342

ROYAL ALBERT HALL
Showboat Cast off to the Deep South for a short revival of the Hammerstein and Kern musical about love and prejudice on a paddle steamer. Opens on June 13 with previews from June 10.
Booking to: June 25
Box office: 020 7589 8212.

SAVOY
The Rat Pack Live from Las Vegas Stylish tribute to Frank Sinatra and his pals.
Box office: 0870 164 8787

SHAFTESBURY
High Society Last few days of a not so swell party as this Cole Porter revival ends its run two months early
Booking to: 19 January
Box office: 020 7379 5399

VAUDEVILLE
Stomp This rather loose adaptation of the musical genre shows no signs of running out of steam.
Booking to: October 1
Box office: 0870 890 0511

VICTORIA PALACE
Billy Elliot. Philip Whitchurch has taken over from Tim Healey in the role of dad in the hit show about the ballet boy from a pit village.
Booking to: October 21
Box office: 0870 895 5577

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Ford announces new Transit range

2006 van range to be followed by minibuses

FORD has announced details of its new Transit range – the first major revision of the product for six years.

Designed to ensure the long-serving and most successful commercial vehicle of all time maintains its competitive advantage, it offers new levels of equipment, comfort and safety.

Developed by Ford's design team at Dunston, Essex, the new Transit will feature new engines from Dagenham, transmissions from Merseyside and will be assembled in Southampton.

Gary Whittam, commercial vehicles director, Ford of Britain, said: "Transit led the market once again in 2005 with 54,300 sales, outselling the nearest rivals by more than three to one. Customer needs have been a driving force behind the improvements in the new Transit and this is the secret of its success."

Barry Gale, chief engineer, commercial vehicles, said: "Customers told us their Transit was a statement about them and their company, so it not only needed to be functional, reliable and durable, but stylish too. Additionally, they wanted a vehicle that was pleasant to drive – that it should never feel like taking a step down from a passenger car."

Ford claims the driving and handling characteristics are more car-like following detailed changes in the suspension which have made significant reductions in noise, vibration and harshness, cutting it by 20%.

An external redesign gives the vehicle a more contemporary frontal profile and interior styling reflects the same user-friendly features as in passenger cars including a new dashboard, instruments, switches and a new steering wheel, while the gear lever is now dash-mounted.

Security and Safety

VEHICLE security has also been improved in a bid to achieve lower insurance ratings and reduce cost of ownership. Two levels of alarm are available, including Thatcham Category 1, while the Transit also features Passive Anti-Theft System, hood lock, cable-free doors and the industry's first configurable unlocking security system, which means customers can choose which doors unlock in which order.

Safety features include Anti-lock Braking System, Electronic Brake Force Distribution, Brake Traction Control System and an Electronic Stability Programme. A driver's airbag is standard while seat-mounted side, head and thorax airbags are available as options for the first time.

Driver comfort

TRANSIT'S interior has been transformed into a pleasant workspace environment with a number of new convenience features, says Ford. These include three levels of heating and ventilation, four trim options including leather, ten seating arrangement options, cruise control availability and a new instrument cluster. A novel feature is the self-charging waterproof ignition key – the first fitted to a vehicle of this type.

Prices will be announced in the summer – ahead of the new Transit becoming available.

Engines

NEW Euro IV TDCi common-rail diesel engines are the first dedicated commercial vehicle powertrains developed through the partnership between Ford Motor Company and PSA Peugeot Citroen and will be built at Ford's Dagenham Diesel Centre. The range offers six diesel engines and one LPG-compatible petrol engine. Diesel options include new 2.2-litre and 2.4-litre Duratorq TDCi units, matched with either five-speed or six-speed Durashift manual transmissions. Ford says the new units deliver increased performance and enhanced fuel economy. The engine layout has also been revised for easier maintenance.

OPERATOR ENJOYS SEASON OF GOODWILL

Traffic commissioner lenient on North East firm with no transport manager

ANDREW JAROSZ, CBW CORRESPNDENT

NEW year spirit flowed in abundance, as North Eastern Traffic Commissioner, Brigadier Tom Macartney let Tyne & Wear operator G&G Travel keep its licence, despite operating without a transport manager for over a year.

Despite submitting incomplete records, and not adhering to undertakings made less than seventeen months earlier, G&G escaped the transport commissioner's wrath, after an extraordinary act of clemency, for a proprietor, who when he encountered problems just "stuck his head in the sand".

Gary Wheatley, trading as G&G Travel, based at Unit 17, Parsons Industrial Estate, Hetton-le-Hole, Houghton-le-Spring, Tyne & Wear, faced a public inquiry at Hillcrest House, Leeds, to consider disciplinary action on its standard national licence for 4 vehicles, following an unsatisfactory maintenance investigation, prohibition notices issued, convictions sustained, and an apparent failure to comply with undertakings, and statements of expectation. Consideration of repute, financial standing together with professional competence was also on the agenda.

Before the proceedings commenced, Ian Shaw, the former transport manager stated that he had resigned from the company, shortly after the previous public inquiry in August 2004. He thought that this would have been around September or October of that year, when he sent a letter to the Traffic Office, which could not now be traced. He said that he had been a part time driver for the Jayline Travel Group, but when he became full time, also being transport manager was just too much. He said that he had left a couple of messages on Mr Wheatley's answerphone, but had not told him personally.

WHAT THE VEHICLE EXAMINER SAID:

VEHICLE Examiner Scott Kirkley presented a report describing a maintenance investigation at the company's premises on August 18, 25 and September 23, when one coach was checked and found satisfactory. He said that the operator has stated that Mr Shaw, the operator's designated transport manager, has left the operator's employment approximately 3-4 months before. Mr. Wheatley himself had assumed the position until such time that a new transport manager is appointed. Having examined the inspection records, he said that various shortcomings were found, with a significant number of safety inspection records not recording the mileage displayed when the inspection was carried out. He said that inspection intervals, both two and therefore four weekly, were exceeded on a significant number of occasions with a period of up to 5 weeks noted.

He said that one safety inspection record showed defects requiring remedial action but no action recorded, the corresponding section verifying the vehicle was now in a fit and roadworthy condition was unsigned. No other evidence of repairs could be produced during the investigation to clarify when any repairs had been carried out. A driver's defect report system is available in the form of a vehicle specific duplicate book. These reports require the signature of the driver to confirm the checks have been carried out and that no observed defects have been found. However very few of the defect reports checked included the mileage displayed when the report was completed.

Mr Kirkley said that the operator has stated that the four-weekly safety inspections are now carried out in-house instead of the declared contractor, in addition to the two weekly in-house inspections. The only exception to this being the safety inspection prior to the vehicle's annual test, which is still being carried out by Volvo Truck & Bus of Washington. He believed that this information had not been declared to the Traffic Office.

He reminded the inquiry of undertakings at the previous public inquiry of August 19 2004, (where the licence discs were reduced from six to four), which included roller brake tests to be carried out every three months, four-weekly safety inspections, with in-house inspections at 2 weekly intervals, and all drivers to be trained to NVQ level 2 standard.

Sixteen prohibitions issued between February 2002 and August 2004 were listed, but only one in December 2004 since the inquiry. He said that the operator received a warning letter in July 2003 regarding prohibitions notices issued, and attended a Public Inquiry in September 1999 regarding Tachograph offences. "File records indicate in recent years this operator has been investigated by HM Customs & Excise and the Police. Indications are a number of convictions have been sustained, the full details of which are unknown to this agency (VOSA)." he added.

In relation to undertakings, Mr Kirkley said that drivers have not been trained to NVQ level 2 standards, because the operator said that local colleges and training establishments would not run this course unless a significant number of attendees were present. He said that an analysis of inspection records indicated that roller brake tests intervals and inspection intervals were both being exceeded on a significant number of occasions, with a period of up to 5 weeks noted. It appeared that vehicles operated had exceeded their stated safety inspection frequency.

WHAT THE OPERATOR SAID:

DURING cross-examination by Geoffrey Littlewood (representing Wheatley), he agreed that there was an improvement in maintenance. Mr Littlewood challenged the evidence saying that the contractual arrangement with Volvo was still in place, but a mobile fitter was being used more because of costs, and dissatisfaction with Volvo's attention to detail. He said that the only prohibition since the last inquiry related to a missing emergency hammer, which was discovered as the coach came back to England from the continent, carrying a group that would have delighted in stealing it. He admitted that on one occasion, coach N853 DKU had missed its check by one week, but said that brake tests were usually performed by Dunn-Line Travel, which had a garage across the road, but its machine did not provide a digital printout.

Proprietor Gary Wheatley said that one of the reasons that two-weekly inspections may have been stretched was that coaches could come in on a Friday and not be dealt with until Monday. In any event, they would not have been used, and sometimes stayed in till Wednesday. Usually

only three coaches would operate, with the fourth being a spare. He said that the company had four roadside checks since the inquiry, and had passed all. He said that the mobile fitter had worked for a number of big companies, and was "as qualified as anyone can be"

Mr Wheatley said that he had no convictions and that no criminal proceedings had been brought against him. He admitted that there had been trouble with HM Customs and Excise over the 'booze specials' that he ran. He said that it had started with a 'behind closed doors' meeting between HM Customs and a selection of North East operators. Customs had demanded comprehensive details of all passengers, but this was refused because it was contrary to the Data protection Act. The companies did agree voluntarily to supply passenger lists with names and dates of birth.

Problems arose in June 2003, when a spare copy of the passenger list was not provided, and Customs deemed everybody to be a smuggler and impounded his coach. He was then asked for £17,500 to release the vehicle. In retaliation, he launched a lengthy civil court battle, which was lost with £25,000 costs – but he was not found guilty of anything. He said that the vehicle which was worth roughly £65,000 at the time, but was now worth £2,500 as scrap, as it had been left out in the open with open roof vents, and was now waterlogged and panels were damaged. "I am now going to pursue this privately, because you can't get away with destroying a vehicle in a compound." he said.

Cross-examined by the Traffic Commissioner, Mr Wheatley admitted that he did not have an international CPC, and brought forward a nomination for a new Transport Manager. Regarding Mr Shaw, he said he had paid him up to about January 2005, when he noticed that he had stopped coming round once or twice a week. "And how much of your work is International" asked Brigadier Macartney. "All of it" was the answer.

"If he wasn't doing any work or turning up, or being paid, why did you think he was the Transport Manager" asked the Traffic Commissioner. "Because I did. If I needed his help, I could have rung him for advice" was the answer.

"Why did you not write to the Traffic Office, seek advice, or ask for exemption" asked Brigadier Macartney. "It must have slipped my mind, because I was busy with other things" was the answer.

Mr Wheatley said that he trained all his drivers by holding regular meetings, showing them how to fill in defect books, how to organise walk round checks and what to look for. He said that at the time of the investigation not all the records were complete, but these had been tidied up recently.

Giving evidence for the company Karen Wheatley, the proprietor's estranged wife, said that she was the company secretary, and had returned to the company last year, putting personal matters aside, in order to drive the business forward. She said that she had put all the records in order, kept an eye on maintenance records, scheduled the inspections, and had improved a failing administration process.

She said that she had split from her husband two years ago, and they hadn't spoken for months. "We had a lot of pressure from HM Customs and other Government agencies, they destroyed our vehicle and destroyed our marriage." she said. "Gary has been slated from pillar to post for years and has had a life of hell, but he is very professional, and many north east operators don't do as much as he does.

"I'm really being kind, and saying I believe you. If your fleet was dangerous, I would take you off the road"

In reply, Brigadier Macartney said that it was his understanding that Customs did not impound vehicles the first time, or the second, but not until the third offence. They are rightly concerned that there is a smuggling industry in the North East and North West which relies on 'mules' who purchase their full entitlement of alcohol and tobacco. "The spirit of what HM Customs are doing is rightful for all of us as taxpayers, and they should be entitles to have manifests as do ferry operators." he said.

Expressing dissatisfaction with the maintenance records present, the Traffic Commissioner granted the company and adjournment to review its brake testing records. "You've had the calling in letter since November, you've seen the Vehicle Examiner's report, I would have thought that you could have prepared a schedule detailing the three vehicles, and when they had their brakes tested in that time.

Following the adjournment Mr Littlewood admitted that the records, which he had studied together with Mr Kirkley, were still incomplete. He submitted that there had been improvements in maintenance, despite the absence of documentation, an improvement in the MOT first time pass rate, a disgusting lack of appreciation and understanding, but "In my mind, Mr Wheatley is not a rogue."

Brigadier Tom Macartney

WHAT THE TRAFFIC COMMISSIONER SAID:

IN delivering his verdict, Brigadier Macartney said that when he issued a formal warning he always emphasised that operators can expect to lose their licence if they did not carry them out.

"On training drivers, at no point has your firm written to me and said we've encountered problems. You've changed your contractor but you haven't written" he said. "Failure to communicate with licensing authorities is potential suicide!"

"The serious issue which has troubled me is that you've done without a Transport Manager since the last Public Inquiry, and you've stuck your head in the sand again. Now you've produced a document from a gentleman who wants to do the job, but he's not here to be scrutinized, and his qualifications haven't been verified."

"I'm really being kind, and saying I believe you. If your fleet was dangerous, I would take you off the road, but I think you are good enough to get your game up. In future, if you have a problem, do write to us, and don't stick your head in the sand!"

Issuing a very strong formal warning, the Traffic Commissioner reduced the disc authorization to three. He insisted that G&G should get itself an appropriate Transport Manager, after a short period of grace.

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OPERATOR: SILVERDALE TOURS

FACT FILE

Chassis/ body:	**Volvo B12B/ Plaxton Panther**
Engine:	**Volvo 420bhp**
Transmission:	**I-Shift**
Seats:	**49**
Spec:	**Theatre-style seating, rear toilet and washroom, air conditioning**
Bought from:	**Hartshornes of Alfreton**

SILVERDALE Tours of Nottingham are celebrating the New Year, and winning several new National Express contracts, with six new Volvo B12Bs – all pressed into service at the beginning of January.

The Plaxton Panther bodied vehicles all feature a 420bhp engine and I-Shift gearbox. The interior is fitted out exactly to National Express specification and features 49 reclining seats in theatre style, rear toilet and washroom and full air-conditioning.

While Silverdale's 50-strong fleet is mostly Volvo, this is the first time the company have taken out a major service contract, with all work being undertaken by local dealer, Hartshornes of Alfreton.

MD, John Doherty, explained, "Although this order was exactly to National Express specification, we would have chosen Volvo anyway. We've always found them to be extremely reliable, had great feedback from passengers and now this service contract gives us even greater peace of mind."

The new vehicles went straight into operation in early January on the Nottingham to London, Derby to London, Retford to London and Nottingham to Newcastle routes and will be in operation seven days a week throughout the year.

Family run Silverdale, established in 1970, cater for all types of coach hire. In addition to the National Express work, they undertake day trips, airport transfers, conference transfers, school trips and European travel hire.

OPERATOR: TURNERS COACHWAYS OF BRISTOL

FACT FILE

Chassis/ body:	**Volvo B12B/ Jonckheere**
Engine:	**Volvo 420bhp**
Transmission:	**I-Shift**
Seats:	**49**
Spec:	**Climate control, central toilet, TV/ DVD, hot and cold drinks facilities**
Bought from:	**Volvo Coach Sales (Loughborough)**

TURNERS COACHWAYS two new Jonckheere-bodied coaches represent two Volvo firsts for the Bristol company: the company's first ever B12Bs and its first I-Shift gearboxes – the prospect of which lured the company back into the Volvo fold after an absence of three years.

Family run Turners has been established in the West Country for 35 years. The firm offers a range of day excursions and short breaks as well as contract hire. The new coaches will be used for both UK and European tour work and are quite highly specified to ensure passengers long distance comfort. Both vehicles have 49 reclining seats, full climate control, central toilet, TV/DVD player and hot and cold drinks facilities.

MD, Tony Turner, admitted that the company had not bought Volvo for three years but was keen to try I-Shift. "We'd heard good reports about I-Shift but wanted to try it out for ourselves," he said. "First impressions are very favourable and my drivers have taken to them with no problems at all. The fuel consumption is a vast improvement over the vehicles they replaced, so although it's early days, it certainly feels like the way forward."

OPERATOR: PULLMAN COACHES

PULLMAN Coaches in Swansea is seeing significant growth in patronage on its city centre-rural routes after increasing the frequency of its services - and the introduction of low-floor Optare Solos last year.

The company, in conjunction with Swansea City Council, bought two 7.8m Solos in 2005 and have now followed that with another four Solos – this time the 2.33m wide Slimline version.

Managing Director Charles Lewis says: "The compact size of the SlimLine Solo makes them ideal for this type of rural service on narrow lanes as well as making them easy to handle in the city centre. At the same time they can carry a full complement of passengers with 31 seated and up to 16 standees in a pleasant travelling environment. They are also fully accessible to passengers in wheelchairs. The result is a bus with good passenger appeal to a wider range of people and this makes the Solo very productive.

FACT FILE

Chassis/ body:	**Optare Solo 9.2m Slimline**
Engine:	**122bhp Mercedes-Benz 904**
Transmission:	**Allison 2000 5-speed automatic**
Seats:	**31 + 16 standees**
Spec:	**Richards and Shaw 'Integra' seats with belts**
Bought from:	**Optare**

LOOK CCTV wins 1.5m euro Dublin Bus contract

MAJOR UK supplier of digital systems, LOOK CCTV, has won its largest ever contract, worth 1.5 million euros, to supply over 550 digital CCTV systems to Dublin Bus, a subsidiary company of Coras Iompair Eireann.

In total, LOOK CCTV will supply and install 565 digital CCTV systems.

George O'Connor, executive operations, engineering, Dublin Bus, said: "Passenger and driver safety is paramount to Dublin Bus. We look forward to working with LOOK CCTV because of the reliability and quality of their systems, as well as their installation expertise, and ongoing commitment to customer service."

LOOK CCTV systems have gained a proven track record in improving driver and passenger safety as well as reducing fraudulent insurance claims, anti-social behaviour and vandalism. Its leading edge digital CCTV systems support up to eight cameras with flexible recording frame rates allowing cameras in specific vehicle areas to have higher resolution and recording rates.

Andrew Prince, managing director of LOOK CCTV, said: "We are delighted to win the Dublin Bus contract, our largest single contract for CCTV systems. Our aim is to provide Dublin Bus with the very best in digital CCTV systems, backed up by a comprehensive installation and support service."

Based in Poulton-le-Fylde in Lancashire, LOOK CCTV is part of Quadnetics Group plc – a specialist in the design, integration and control of advanced CCTV and networked video systems. For further information visit *www.lookcctv.com* or telephone Andrew Prince on 01253 891222, e-mail *andrew.prince@lookcctv.com.*

LOOK CCTV is installing digital CCTV systems on 565 vehicles from the Dublin Bus fleet

Heartbeat prevents on-board CCTV system failure

CCTV specialist 21st Century has developed a maintenance programme which remotely and automatically monitors the operational status of CCTV systems.

The company says its 'Heartbeat' technology is a valuable asset to transport operators fighting a constant battle to keep their systems operational. A temporary equipment failure, however caused, can often precede an incident, rendering the system ineffectual. 21st Century believes traditional manual maintenance is both costly and time consuming and cannot provide 100% cover.

Heartbeat operates remotely, monitoring and reporting on every CCTV camera in the company's innovative ProGuard CCTV system. Any problems, including vandalism and obscured views, are immediately highlighted and the exact location of the problem identified. It employs WiFi wireless technology which communicates with Black Box technology linked to on-board systems.

Using the RAG Status (red, amber green) system, problems can be identified immediately and an engineer sent to the right location with advance warning of the nature of the fault.

Paul Frodsham, MD of 21st Century, said: "CCTV is now an integral part of any public transport system. Heartbeat will instantly recognise when there is a problem with a camera or elsewhere in the system and identify the location of the fault so it can be quickly rectified."

● Details from Alison McCalpin on 01353 659564, or e-mail *alison@elyoffice.fsnet.co.uk* or Nick Grimond, 0208 7107707, or via the website at *www.cctvonthebuses.co.uk*

New role for Gail Ashmore

INFOCELL, the specialist GPRS-based Real Time Information systems provider, has appointed Gail Ashmore (right) as sales manager.

She was previously project manager for the north of England and has gained a wide experience of RTI systems implementation along with an understanding of customer needs and expectations.

Gail joined Infocell in 2002 after successfully leading the sales activity of ICL's accounting software systems to the local authority market.

She can be contacted via Infocell on 01342 719196.

Portable navigation system

VDO Dayton has launched a portable navigation system with access to full European mapping.

Referred to as the MS 2000 PND portable navigation device, it has a 3.5 inch display with touch-screen menu. It runs from its own batteries or can plug into a cigarette lighter socket. It can be purchased with an optional remote control device allowing drivers to operate it while driving.

The MS 200 costs £479.99, or £499 with the remote control.

Details on 0800 215315 or website *www.vdodayton.com*

TEK Seating opens SitSmart site

SEAT supplier TEK Seating recently opened a new SitSmart display facility at its premises in Tunbridge Wells.

TEK has created the SitSmart division as an extension to its aftermarket services and is able to show its products in a relaxed, stylish environment, it says. Examples of seating from Stokke, RH Form, KAB, Grahl, Grammer and Isringhausen are available.

● TEK details on 01892 515028, e-mail *sales@tekseating.co.uk*, website *www.tekseating.co.uk*

● SitSmart details on 01892 510202, e-mail *sales@sitsmart.co.uk, website www.sitsmart.co.uk*

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From 2nd February CBW is producing a 16 page Minibus supplement. This all new monthly publication will include all the Minibus and Accessiblity news along with dedicated articles and products for this specialised industry.

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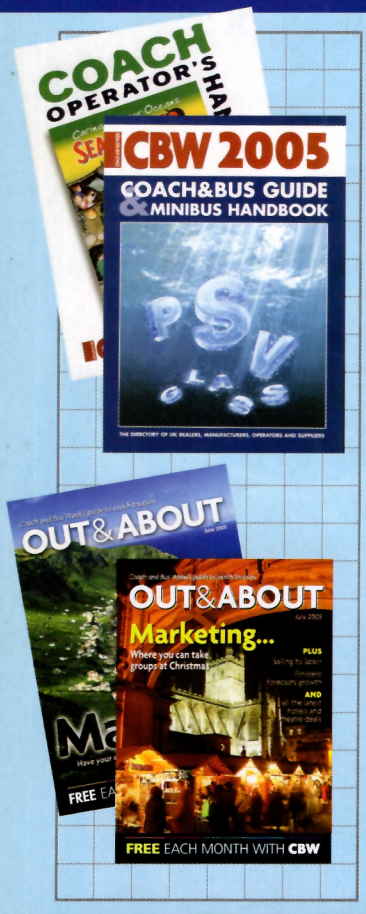

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1996 P REG MERCEDES 609D

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Y REG TOYOTA HIACE

2.4 Diesel,5 speed ,pas, medium wheel base, low roof, side loading door with step, 3 seats 7 two wheel chair positions,q- sraint restraint system, ricon fully automatic tail lift, one owner mint condition, 33,000 miles

Y REG 2001 VOLKSWAGEN TRANSPORTER

2.5Tdi automatic, powered steering, mwb, side loading door, 5 seats plus 1 wheel chair, unwin tracking, with side mounted ricon tail lift, one owner, mint condition, 33,000 miles

1999 T REG PEUGEOT BOXER

2.5 Deisel ,5 speed ,pas, lwb, euromotive conversion side loading door with step, 11 semi high back seats , unwin tracking, ricon tail lift, 52,000 miles. V good condition , one owner

X REG 2000 VOLKSWAGEN TRANSPORTER

2.5Tdi automatic transmission pas, lwb, high roof, sld,4 seats plus 1 or 2 wheel chair, q-straint wheelchair resraint system, ricon taillift ,one owner, mint condition, 39,500 miles

2000 V REG PEUGEOT BOXER

2.5 Deisel ,5 speed ,pas, l w b, excel conversion side loading door with step, 12 semi high back seats, unwin tracking, ricon tail lift, v good condition, one owner

51 REG VOLKSWAGEN LT28

2.5 Turbo diesel, pas, short wheel base, low roof, twin side loading doors with step,8 passenger high back seats with head rest, ricon tail lift, unwin tracking, mint condition one owner, 36,000 miles. Ideal taxis

X REG PEUGEOT BOXER

2.5 Deisel ,5 speed ,pas, long wheel base, high roof, side loading door with step, 12 semi high back seats, unwin tracking

2001 Y REG RENAULT MASTER MM33

2.2 Dci ,5 speed ,pas, mwb, o & h conversion side loading door with avs step, 7 seats plus 2 wheelchair spaces, ricon tail lift, unwin tracking, mint condition one owner

T REG IVECO 59.12

2.8 Diesel turbo, semi automatic, mellor coachbuilt body, p a s, 16 removable semi high back seat's, unwin tracking, pls fully automatic tail lift, power door front entry,one owner, ex local authority, low miles 66,000 kms

2003 03 REG RENAULT TRAFFIC 100

1.9 Dci, 5 speed ,pas, short wheel base, o & h conversion, side loading door, 5 seats plus 1 wheel chair, unwin tracking, Ricon tail lift, one owner mint condition, 18,000 miles

1999 – 2001 FORD TRANSIT 2.5 TD

Chassis Development coachbuilt body, p a s, 14-16 removable semi high back seat's,unwin tracking, ricon internal and underfloor tail lift, sliding door front entry,one owner, ex local authority, very low miles. Choice of 4

X REG 2000 LDV CONVOY

2.5 Diesel turbo, 5 speed manual,uvg coachbuilt body, p a s, 16 removable semi high back seat's,unwin tracking, ricon underfloor tail lift, power door front entry,one owner, ex local authority,

NEW UN REGISTERED VOLKSWAGEN LT46

Turbo diesel, vdl kuster conversion, 16 seats. Large power plug door, high roof, bonded windows, low m2 floor, m2 high back seats 3 wheel chair positions ,tracking, heater, lowered floor with fold out side ramp

NEW UN REGISTERED, VOLSWAGEN LT35

2.5 Turbo diesel, lwb, uprated to 3850kgs gvw, 15 abacus high back seats + driver,.Sliding side door with avs step, high roof, Unwin tracking, amf pls fully automatic internal tail lift, new conversion in stock.

2002 52 REG RENAULT MASTER LM35

2.Dci, 5 speed, pas, lwb, euromotive conversion side loading door with avs step, 12 seats, glide rite lowering suspension with fold out ramp, unwin tracking, mint condition one owner, 55,000 – 64,000 miles. Choice of 3

51 – 03 REG RENAULT MASTER, T35

2.5, 5 Speed, pas, long wheel base, mellor conversion side loading door with avs step, 14 seats or 10 plus 2 wheel chairs, unwin tracking, ricon tail lift, mint condition, 30,000 miles. Choice of 2

2002 52 REG FORD TRANSIT 350

Long wheel base, turbo diesel, automatic, pas, high rofside entry door with step, 12 high back seats, unwin tracking for 2 w/chairs ratcliff underfloor tail lift, one owner, very low miles 5500 miles

2001 Y REG FIAT DUCATO

Rohill triaxle coachbuilt, 2.8 Turbo diesel, pas, air operated side loading door with low entry, 16 high back seats, glide rite lowering suspension fold out portaramp, unwin tracking, mint condition one owner, 48,500 miles

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04 REG, VOLKSWAGEN LT35 MWB

2.5 Turbo diesel 109 bhp,pas, advaced conversion, sld, 8 high back seats + driver, rear bulk head fitted with microwave and handwash rear storage area with hand wash and tool storage, ex demo 16,000 miles

04 REG 2004 RENAULT MASTER, LM35

2.2Dci, 5 speed, pas, air bags, abs, long wheel base, mellor conversion, side loading door, 17 m1 tested seats fitted to m1 tested floor ex lease mint condition, low miles

52 REG, VOLKSWAGEN LT46

2.5 Turbo diesel 109 bhp, pas, stanford conversion, side loading door with step, 17 high back seats with head rest, ex local council only 39,000 kms. Coif.

02 REG, VOLKSWAGEN LT35

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1999 T REG DAF SB3000
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1997 P REG DAF SB3000
Ikarus 396/50 body, 53 seater, CD & video

1999 T REG DAF SB3000
Plaxton Premiere 350, 53 seater

1991 K LEYLAND OLYMPIANS
Cummins L10/ZF, 78 seaters, low height, good tests

1987 E REG LEYLAND OLYMPIANS
Gardner 6LXB/Hydracyclic, Optare body, 76 seats, good tests

1983 Y Reg Leyland Olympian,
Gardner/Hydracyclic, 77 seater, lowheight, new test.

1997/8 R REG DENNIS DARTS SLF,
Cummins/Allison, Plaxton Pointer 2 bodies, 36 seats

1994 L REG DENNIS DART,
Cummins/Allison, Plaxton Pointer, 40 seater.

1997 P REG VOLVO OLYMPIANS,
Alexander bodies, 2 doors, 68 seats, or can be single doored and upseated to 78

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98 (R) **LDV Convoy 400,** L/R17 seat minibus, 2.5ltr Ford engine, PSV Aug 06 ..... £4,000
98 (R) **LDV Convoy 400,** 17 seat Minibus 2.5ltr Diesel Ford Engine, MOT March 2006 ..... £2,500
98 (R) **LDV Convoy 400,** 17 seat H/R Minibus 2.5ltr Ford Diesel Engine. New MOT 40,000 miles £3,850
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R (98) **Iveco Ford 49/10** Euromotive Conversion 17seat/5 wheelchair Accessible bus. Electric plug door. PLS Lift. 47,000 miles ..... P.O.A.
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The estimated requirement is for at least 1 course of approximately 5 hours per week.

The contract will commence in May 2006, and run for a period of three years.

If you are interested in Tendering please write to: -

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by 9th February 2006 at 12 noon quoting reference Proc/0201 and stating whether you wish to receive a hardcopy or an electronic copy of the tender document.

The completed Tender should be returned by 17 February 2006 at 12 noon.

For further information contact Denville Powell on telephone number 0121-303 0013 or email denville_j_powell@birmingham.gov.uk.

EVENTS DIARY

2006

January 26:
School Transport 06 Conference, Barbican Centre, London. Association of Transport Co-ordinating Officers, with *CBW* media partnership. Details on 0207 324 4330, *www.neilstewartassociates.com/st125* or fax 0207 490 8830.

January 26:
Bus Regulation: Partnership, Contracts or a Third Way? Landor Conferences. Royal Society of Medicine, London W1. Details on 0845 270 7965.

January 26:
CPT Annual Dinner, Hilton Hotel, Park Lane, London. Clare Kehoe on 020 7240 3131, e-mail *clarek@cpt-uk.org*

January 31 to February 1:
Travel Technology Show, Olympia, London. For tour operators. +44 (0) 20 7970 6546 or see website *www.traveltechnologyshow.com*

February 13 to 16:
CPT London Home Counties Study Tour to the Netherlands, with Bova and Berkhof, Eindhoven and Maastricht. MEMBERS ONLY. Sponsored by P&O Ferries and VVV Maastricht. Fax Ling Tang, CPT, 0207 240 6565 for details

February 28:
Reducing Crime on Public Transport Conference, Earls Court One, London. *CBW* media partner. Contact 020 7324 4330, *www.neilstewartassociates.com/li226* for registration, or fax 0207 490 8830

March 1-2:
British Travel Trade Fair, NEC Birmingham.

March 8-9:
Moving On Conference, Crown Plaza Hotel, Glasgow, *www.moving-on-conference.co.uk*, or tel: 0191 241 4523 *www.britishtraveltradefair.com*

March 14-16:
International Road Transport Union 30th World Congress, Dubai World Trade Centre. *www.iru.org*

April 4:
London Transport Awards Dinner, London Hilton. 01224 263134

April 6-7: 30th UK Transport Conference and Exhibition:'Wasted Miles, Wasted Money'. University of Nottingham. Phone CICC: 01223 881622 or *annchapman@CICC-conferences.org.uk*

April 7-9:
Coach Tourism Council/ Bonded Coach Holidays Conference 2006, Llandudno, North Wales. 01227 762200 or email *david.smith@coachtourismcouncil.com*

April 22/23:
UK Coach Rally, Brighton

April 24-26:
CPT Scotland Annual Conference, Gleneagles. Gail Hume 0131 272 2150, email: *gailhume@cpt-uk.freeserve.co.uk*

April 25/27:
CV Show, NEC, Birmingham

May 8/10:
ALBUM Conference, Cardiff. Details: Karen Stafford-Smith 029 2078 7700.

May 9-13:
Motortec automotive show, IFEMA, Madrid, Spain. *www.motortecoline.com*, +34 91 722 3000

May 21-28:
CPT Study Tour 2006, Singapore/Kuala Lumpur. Details on 0207 240 3131

October 10 to 12:
CTA National Community & Voluntary Transport Event, G-Mex Centre, Manchester. *www.communitytransport.com*, or call +44 870 774 3586

November 7-9:
Euro Bus Expo, NEC. 0870 224 8619, *eurobusxpo@expom.co.uk*

November 24-25:
Coach and Bus Show 2006, RDS, Dublin. Contact *www.cttc.ie, c.collins.cttc@ioi.ie*

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British Travel Trade Fair would like to thank Redwing Coaches for their help and contribution to this years' creative theme.

ONE SHOP-STOP SHAMES THE REST

THE bus stops near CBW aren't the kind you see in major cities or even in rural AREAS.

In cities, huge advertising companies erect shining, glass structures with glowing timetables and tippy seats. In rural areas, the local chippie turns out and builds a little sunhouse out of roughly-hewn logs, equipping it with a nice bench, and the WI turn up and plant flowers round it.

In Peterborough, the bus shelter is made of old scaffold poles and has wire mesh where the glass should be. True, vandals who haven't gone equipped with an acetylene cutting torch or angle grinder can't damage them. But then they don't shelter anyone, rather defeating the object.

In East Knoyle, they must have had some awesome bus shelters. One of them is being converted into a new village shop.

The residents of the Wiltshire village didn't want to lose its effectiveness as a bus stop, so it doubles up on uses. In fact, it trebles up, for the new one will also be an internet café. And for good measure, the residents are hoping to use the new shop-stop to ratchet up the rural bus services.

Please, Peterborough, take note....

There's shelters and there's shelters

2 MINUTE INTERVIEW

FULL NAME: Harold Burke
AGE: 50 – But only just!
OCCUPATION: Sales director at The UK Holiday Group
WHAT SHAPE IS THE COACH AND BUS INDUSTRY IN?: In general I think it's in good shape, but the bank managers may have a different view and the some companies are grateful for the creative spin of their accountant!
WHAT ANNOYS YOU MOST ABOUT IT?: Nothing – it's kept me fed and watered for more than 30 years and it's no good moaning about things, just get on with it
WHO, IF ANYONE, WILL ALWAYS BE REMEMBERED FOR THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO THE INDUSTRY, AND WHY?: All those who have the courage and vision to set up their own business - they get the wheels turning and keep people like me gainfully employed
WHICH EVENT OF THE LAST 50 YEARS HAS CAUSED IT THE MOST DAMAGE? Terrorism and the rise of the budget airlines
WHAT WAS YOUR THE PROUDEST MOMENT IN YOUR WORKING LIFE?: Picking up an award for Pontins at the first ever Coach and Bus Week Industry Awards. Our night at the Oscars
WHAT'S THE PUNCHLINE OF YOUR FAVOURITE JOKE?: A customer comnment: ' I can't thank your driver enough, he kept on servicing me all through the night' Well done that man!
WHO, WHETHER ALIVE OR DEAD, FICTIONAL OR REAL, WOULD YOU LIKE TO HAVE AS PASSENGERS ON A LONG JOURNEY?: Peter Kay as my tour guide, Oasis for the music and their good taste in football, and Oliver Reed to keep the Gallagher brothers in order – or will he?
AND WHERE WOULD YOU MOST LIKE TO BE HEADING?: Who cares, it's the company that matters

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Troels Andersen,
Transport Co-ordinator,
Odense Municipality, Denmark

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Travelling to School Project,
Department for Transport

Penny Jones, Chair,
Travelling to School Project,
Department for Education and Skills

Tim Davies, Immediate Past Chairman,
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Catherine Rawas,
Development Manager, Walk21

Paul Osborne, Director,
Safe Routes to Schools Project

Sheena Pickersgill,
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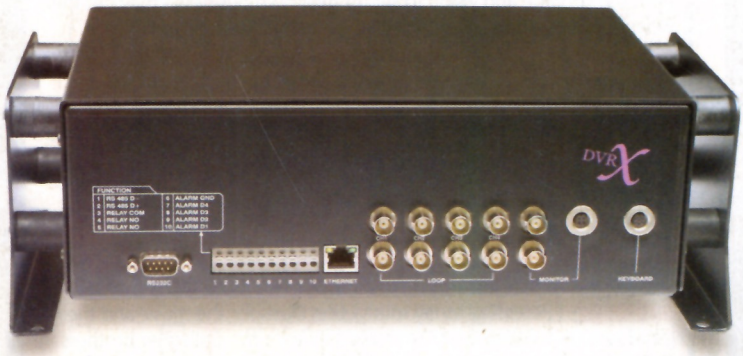

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